



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
Congregation Beth Tikvah
304 E. Midland Avenue ~ Paramus NJ 07652- 201.262.7691

A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday December 16, 2022 ~ Parsha: Vayeshev

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Watch This Two Minute Chanukah Video!

There is no shortage of Chanukah videos on the internet. Move over December Dilemma! Whether serious or funny, charming, or somewhat risqué, these videos make bold, amusing and even passionate statements about Chanukah, and highlight its significance in the American landscape.

Among my recent favorites are:

- Smokey Robinson [mispronouncing](#) Chanukah.
- Saturday Night Live parodying [Smokey Robinson](#) mispronouncing Chanukah.
- Jewish a cappella sensation *Six13* channeling their inner [Elton John](#).
- Or their inner [Queen](#) (RIP Freddy Mercury).
- For children, there is this classic [Sesame Street](#) clip.
- There's the one that got the whole Chanukah video movement started, Adam Sandler singing *The Chanukah Song* on [Saturday Night Live](#) 28 years ago.
- Daveed Diggs (of *Hamilton* fame) blew up the internet with his dream of a [puppy](#) for Chanukah.

The list goes on and on. But there is one short Chanukah video that I would really like you to watch this year. This video is not designed to amuse you, but rather to teach you something of tremendous value about Chanukah.

You know the broad outlines of the Chanukah story. A series of edicts (*Gezairot* in Hebrew) enacted by the Seleucid (Syrian Greek) rulers of the land of Israel in approximately 167 BCE forced many Jews to choose between their religious heritage

and obligations, or assimilation into the larger Greek culture that the Syrian Greeks sought to impose throughout their empire. Many died or were persecuted severely for their commitment to maintaining their Jewish observances and way of life. Stories in the Book of Maccabees like that of [Hannah](#) and her seven sons testify to both the courage as well as suffering that our ancestors endured.

Another response to the Syrian Greek persecution was to flee the major cities and seek haven in the Judean desert. This was attested to in I Maccabees 2:29, "At that time, [many](#) who sought righteousness and justice went to live in the desert."

Earlier this week, the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) announced a major archaeological discovery of a cache of 2200 year old silver coins near the Dead Sea, the first physical proof that Jews fled to this area during the upheaval and persecutions of Antiochus IV (Antiochus Epiphanes), the Syrian Greek king responsible for the edicts. Archaeologists found a small, well preserved wooden box holding 15 [tetradrachm](#) coins, minted in Egypt and dating up to 170 BCE, just before the implementation of the harsh measures that prevented freedom of worship for Jews in the land of Israel. According to the IAA, this hoard was stashed by a Jew fleeing persecution and who presumably died in the violence that led to the Maccabean revolt. In today's terms, the coins are worth about two month's salary of an average wage. This discovery is one of many major archaeological finds in this area over the past 70 years, helping us not only to understand Jewish life during this period of time, but the unique history and culture of Jews who fled to this desolate area during the time of Syrian Greek oppression, as well as under Roman oppression 200 years later.

The dating of the coins is significant in that it seems to confirm that people responded to the words of the eventual founder of the Maccabean revolt, Mattityahu, (Mattathias), the father of Judah the Maccabee, who had [encouraged](#) people to literally "head for the hills." It was from these places where people had sought refuge that the revolt actually began.

From our study of archaeology, we know that the caves where our ancestors sought shelter in the desert were quite difficult to reach, the terrain was difficult, and many hostile tribes claimed this area as well. The discovery of these coins also indicated the level of desperation of those who fled the Greeks.

This [short video](#), explains the significance of this amazing discovery. I think it's a fair statement that the release of this news now was designed to help us gain a greater perspective on the importance of Chanukah. This discovery gives voice to the passion, commitment, and efforts of our ancestors to live as free Jews under terrible conditions. It's a reminder to us to live our Judaism freely within the benevolent conditions with which we have been blessed.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Arthur Weiner