



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday December 19, 2025 ~ Parshat: Miketz/
Shabbat Chanukah

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

This Is the Chanukah Video That Matters

Three years ago, I sent a Shabbat message to the community titled [Watch This Two Minute Chanukah Video](#). While admittedly, not among my deepest or most theologically significant messages, it was among my favorites. In that message, I compiled several amusing Chanukah videos flying across the Jewish side of the internet, while at the same time suggesting a new, far more significant one for your review. That Shabbat message was the most read message since I began the current blog five years ago, receiving at least four times as many readers as usual.

This year, I want you to take several minutes and view a new, and much different [video](#). Believe me, you will remember it far more than any other you might see this year.

With the permission of the families of six Israeli hostages murdered by Hamas in August 2024, the Israeli government recently released a video of those six hostages lighting Chanukah candles in December 2023 in the hell hole of the Gaza tunnels. This video was prepared by Hamas, likely for propaganda purposes, and meant to counter emerging narratives about the brutality of the conditions the hostages faced. Those conditions were so horrific that even media outlets generally sympathetic to the Palestinian cause could not ignore them. The video is unlike other clips published during the war that showed hostages reading statements evidently dictated by their captors. I would ask that you take a few minutes and watch this video, as well as view a series of photos.

It's hard to watch this video and see these Israeli hostages attempt to retain their Judaism, their humanity and their dignity, despite the cruel and inhumane treatment they were subjected to. And it is especially hard when one remembers that they were murdered in August 2024, approximately 9 months after this video was taken. But we must watch it nonetheless. And by doing so, we are not only remembering these six precious souls, but also something essential about Chanukah.

Chanukah is often understood and even celebrated as a holiday of triumph, and of light overcoming darkness. Yet, Chanukah celebrates something far more significant and profound than just victory. The Maccabees original goal was not to liberate the land of Israel from Syrian Greek oppression. That would eventually come, restoring Jewish sovereignty for the first time since the destruction of the First Temple four centuries earlier. The Maccabees first fought to stop the *Gezairot*, the edicts which forbade the teaching and practice of Judaism in the land of Israel. They fought to assert Jewish identity and faith at the very moment when it was most threatened. If you understand that essential truth, the hostages lighting Chanukah candles in the tunnels of Gaza was a modern day reenactment of the generation that defied the Syrian Greeks, who also were deprived of freedom, and uncertain of survival. The message is the same. You can control our bodies, but not our belonging. The future was uncertain. There was no guarantee of victory. But they lit the menorah anyway. That's Chanukah at its core.

Yes, we love our *latkes* and jelly donuts and gifts and decorations and all the other things that have become part of the holiday celebrations and add to the joy of the holidays. But let each of us understand the heroism of those six hostages. In a place designed to erase their very humanity, they affirmed it. The makeshift candles they lit will shine brighter than any we may light, for with them they made a statement that has sustained Jews in every generation since the original observance of Chanukah in 164 BCE.

We are more than victims.

We are more than numbers.

We are Jews.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Arthur D. Weiner