

Chanukah: A Focus on Education

By Rabbi Mayer Freedman

The Greeks enacted a number of decrees in order to prevent the Jews from practicing Judaism and to encourage them to accept their hedonistic perspective. According to the Midrash, one unusual edict required all Jews to inscribe on the horn of an ox the words, "I renounce my relationship with the God of Israel." The Midrash explains that this law in particular "darkened the eyes of the Jewish people".



The Greeks outlawed keeping Shabbos. They forbade Brit Milah. They wouldn't allow the Jews to study the Torah. Yet this requirement to write that they have no connection to the God of Israel is what finally "got to" the Jews. Why did they find this particular edict to be so unbearably harsh, so much more than the others? Surely the other decrees were far more severe and really struck at the core of Judaism more than this one.

One explanation given for the extreme distress of the Jewish people regarding this law is that now the Greeks were attempting to exert influence even over the young children. The Talmud tells us that horns used to be hollowed out and used by young children. Semi-solid food was inserted into the wide end, while the child sucked on the narrow end. The Greeks were attempting to disrupt the tutelage of the

children by having them ingest hedonistic messages almost with their mother's milk, from an age so young that they couldn't yet eat proper food! The Greeks knew that if they appropriated the education of the children they would succeed in Hellenizing the Jewish nation.¹



We have all heard about the relatively recent Pew study chronicling the breakdown of Judaism in America. The way to reverse direction is to realize that our children are our future and Jewish continuity is dependent upon the education with which we provide our youth. We must take a lesson from the Greeks and from as early an age as possible we must begin to inculcate our children with a love for Judaism, a love for God, and a love for His Torah. We must make sure that the schools to which we send our children support our



passion for Judaism and are equally devoted to the future of the Jewish nation. We must make sure that we are properly supporting the institutions of Jewish education

in our communities. With this, we can rest assured that the Jewish people will continue to survive and thrive.

¹ I heard this explanation a number of years ago, but do not remember the source. If you know of the source, please inform me of it.