

**INTRODUCTION BY ROBIN MARGO S.C. TO
PRE-CHANUKAH CELEBRATION AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE - 1 DEC 2009**

The Hon Nathan Rees MP, Premier of New South Wales and Minister for the Arts and for the Central Coast

The Hon Amanda Fazio MLC, President of the Legislative Council

The Hon Kayee Griffin MLC, Deputy President of the Legislative Council

The Hon Richard Torbay MP, Speaker of the NSW Legislative Assembly

The Hon John Aquilina MP, Leader of the House and Parliamentary Secretary

The Hon Eric Roozendaal MLC, Treasurer and Minister for State Development

The Hon Kristina Keneally MP, Minister for Planning, for Infrastructure and for Redfern Waterloo

The Hon Michael Daley MP, Minister for Police and for Finance

The Hon Jodi McKay MP, Minister for Commerce, for Tourism, for the Hunter, and for Science and Medical Research

The Hon Graham West MP, Minister for Juvenile Justice, for Volunteering and for Youth and Minister assisting the Premier on Veterans' Affairs

The Hon Tony Kelly MP, Minister for Primary Industries and for Lands, Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council and Leader of the House in the Legislative Council

The Hon Peter Primrose MLC, Minister for Regulatory Reform and for Mineral Resources

Mr Barry O'Farrell MP, the Leader of the Opposition

Members of both Houses of Parliament and all parties

Ms Wajiha Ahmed of the Community Relations Commission

Mr Bawa Jain, Secretary-General of the World Council of Religious Leaders

Mr Paul Howes, National Secretary of the Australian Workers Union

Robert Goot AM SC, President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry

Rabbi Feldman, Head of Chabad in NSW, Dean and Spiritual Leader of the Yeshiva Centre, Honorary Life President of the Rabbinical Council of NSW and Patron of the Organisation of Rabbis of Australasia

Other Learned Rabbis

Community leaders

Other distinguished guests

This evening's function is an initiative of the Yeshiva and Chabad NSW. The Yeshiva and Chabad are an important section of our community. They are not members of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies but have invited me to say a few words of welcome this evening in recognition of the Board's role as the elected, representative roof body and voice of the NSW Jewish community. I thank Rabbi Feldman and the Yeshiva for that gesture. And I thank the Premier, President, Speaker, Leader of the Opposition and Members of Parliament for hosting this function.

Guests of other faiths may be interested to know that the Jewish festival of Chanukah is referred to with variations in many ancient sources, including:

- the first and second books of the Maccabees in the Septuagint, which are deuterocanonical for Catholics and Eastern and Oriental Orthodox but apocryphal for Protestants and modern day Judaism and;
- the Gemara tractate Shabbat 21 in the Talmud,
- the first chapter of the first book of Flavius Josephus's History of the Antiquities of the Jews, which was the book mainly used in many Christian households before the arrival of the King James Bible,
- the Aramaic original of the Aggadic Scroll of Antiochus, also known as "Megillat HaHashmonaim" or "Megillat Hanukkah", later translated into Hebrew, and by the Saadia Gaon into Arabic; and
- the Gospel of St John, 10:22: ["And it was at Jerusalem, the feast of the Dedication (Chanukah), and it was winter."]

Chanukah commences on the eve of 25 Kislev in the Jewish calendar, corresponding this year to the evening of 11 December, and lasts for 8 days, eight, being one step beyond the seven days of creation, that is, of completion of the material cosmos, and thus representing the Infinite. And Chanukah has been celebrated continuously since 165 BCE.

Ten years before that date, Antiochus IV (Epiphanes or, as the Jews and other subject peoples called him, Epimanes!) had seized the throne of that part of the trifold division of Alexander the Great's Empire that was centred on Syria. Conservative and Hellenising factions of the Jewish priestly class (Oniads and Tobiads) became involved in the rivalry between Antiochus IV and Ptolemy VI of Egypt and that resulted eventually in Antiochus not merely seeking to Hellenise the Jews, but to denationalise them, to destroy their national identity. He desecrated and plundered the Temple in Jerusalem, forbade the practice of circumcision, and waged a war of extermination against the Jews and Judaism.

As we know, that led in turn to the revolt of Mattathias or Matityahu and his five sons, Jochanan, Simeon, Eleazar, Jonathan, and Judah, who took to the mountains and led a three year guerrilla war against Antiochus that resulted in the restoration of Jewish national independence under the Hasmonean dynasty, heroic events referred to, for those who are familiar with it, in Handel's Oratorio "Judas Maccabeus" (albeit in association there with less edifying references to the butchery after the battle of Culloden by the English King's son, the Duke of Cumberland).

Chanukah means "dedication" and I will leave it to Rabbi Feldman to explain the traditional story, as the Talmud records it, and the deeper meanings of the miracle of light that occurred when the Maccabees cleansed and rededicated the Temple in Jerusalem, choosing for that purpose the same day in the month of Kislev as that on which Nehemiah had relit the fire on the high altar of the Temple in Jerusalem during the 20th year of the reign of the Persian king Artaxerxes, 280 years earlier.

For us Jews, the heroism of Matityahu and of Judas Maccabeus and his glorious brothers symbolises the faith that must not be allowed to die and that the force of the Spirit, and a willingness to sacrifice even life itself, can enable even a small people to triumph over a mighty military power.

It is an enduring symbol also of the assertion and triumph of national self-determination and the free practice of one's religion, which is a natural right of all peoples, including, it is unfortunately necessary to remind some people, the Jews.