

RABBI'S MESSAGE

A Light that Lasts

Hanukkah comes “early” this year...and not a moment too soon! If ever there was a time when we can use a little extra light, it's this year. Technically, Hanukkah begins on the 25th of Kislev on the Hebrew calendar, which is set by the moon. With the full moon coming in the middle of the month, Hanukkah is designed to be during the darkest days of the darkest month.

We all know about Hanukkah. The Hanukkah menorah is one of the most recognizable symbols of Judaism, and because of its proximity on the calendar to Christmas, Hanukkah is one of the most widely celebrated holidays we have. Children can't wait for Hanukkah because of the expectation of presents. We enjoy our dreidel games, our latkes, our songs, and our candles while remembering the Maccabees unlikely victory over a powerful empire that tried to eliminate the Jewish religion. We light the candles for eight nights, celebrating a miracle that teaches us that even limited resources can last as long as we need them to last...when we have faith.

I suggest that Hanukkah is much more than the gift-giving that has made it popular, and even more than the story of a military victory. The most powerful image, for me, is shining a light into the darkness. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, known as the beloved “Rebbe” to millions, taught, *“In a hall of perfect darkness, totally dark, if you light one small candle, its light will be seen from afar; its precious light will be seen by everyone.”* This teaching inspired his students and others to find metaphorically dark places. When we think about darkness and light, we know we can bring rays of sunshine and droplets of light that will shine brightly. These lights are about bringing cheer to a lonely, ill, or elderly person, sending a card or note to brighten someone's day, and reminding loved ones that they are loved.

These times, not just the calendar of December or Kislev, are potentially very dark times. Our social and family connections are limited. Our country has just completed a contentious election. We are worried about the near and distant future and we're trying our best to stay safe and healthy. It's even hard to see a friendly smile beneath our protective masks. This is the time that just a little bit of light can truly last.

In the classic story of Hanukkah, the valuable resource that provided light was olive oil. No matter how much oil we have, there is always a chance it can run out. Our most valuable resource is the light we have inside our hearts that we can share with others. The light of human kindness can transform any dark time or dark place into a burst of sunshine. And that is a much more precious gift than any presents we can buy.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon