

Inspiration for Each Night of Hanukkah

Sixth Night: Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, Chancellor Emeritus

This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel [the leader of the puny band of exiles who returned in 537 B.C.E. from Babylon to found what would become the Second Jewish Commonwealth]: Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit—said the Lord of Hosts (Zech. 4:6).

וַיַּעַן וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֵי לְאֹמֵר
זֶה דְבַר-ה' אֶל-זֶרְבָבֶל
לֵאמֹר לֹא בְחַיִל וְלֹא
בְכַח כִּי אִם-בְּרוּחִי
אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת.



In the long run, Jewish survival is not a matter of military might or political sagacity, important as they both are, but an inner resolve that springs from faith. And it is to drive home that fundamental lesson of Jewish history that the rabbis chose to read the words of the prophet Zechariah on the Shabbat of Hanukkah.

What do you think sustains the Jewish people? Faith? Something else?

Seventh Night: Professor Arnold M. Eisen, Chancellor

[A] frank appraisal of the periods in which Judaism flourished will indicate that not only did a certain amount of assimilation and acculturation not impede Jewish continuity, but that in a profound sense, this assimilation and acculturation was a stimulus to original thinking and expression, a source of renewed vitality. (Chancellor Gerson Cohen, z"l, "The Blessing of Assimilation in Jewish History")



The Hanukkah story is the perfect stimulus for such reflections, especially when read, as some historians do, not as a conflict between Jews and a tyrannical government, but as a dispute among Jews themselves over which Greek customs are acceptable and which cross the line to assimilation or apostasy.

Where have you seen assimilation or acculturation provide "renewed vitality" to Judaism?

Eighth Night: Dr. Benjamin D. Sommer, Professor of Bible

הַן בְּכֹל דּוֹר / יִקּוּם הַגִּבּוֹר / גּוֹאֵל הָעָם.
שְׁמַע! בְּיָמִים הֵם בְּזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה! / מַכְבִּי
מוֹשִׁיעַ וּפּוֹדֵה!
See, in every generation / A hero arises /
Who saves the nation. / Listen! In those
days in this season! / The Maccabee was
a savior, a redeemer! (Zionist Hanukkah
song by Menashe Rabina)



In every age a hero or sage / Arose to our aid. / Hark! In days of yore in Israel's ancient land / Brave Maccabeus led the faithful band. (English adaptation of the same song by Judith K. Eisenstein, published in *Union Songster: Songs and Prayers for Jewish Youth*, New York, 1960)

[T]he [1960] song puts him [Judah Maccabee] next to a sage, and it mentions his followers' faith as prominently as his own bravery. ... The contrast between these two songs encapsulates a debate between two views not only of Hanukkah but of Judaism and of Jewish history.

What do you value in a leader? Might and bravery? Knowledge and faith? Something else?

TORAH FROM JTS HANUKKAH SPECIAL



Blessings and Songs for Hanukkah Candle Lighting

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֵׁל חֲנֻכָּה.

*Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha'olam,
asher kideshanu bemitzvotav, vetzivanu lehadlik ner shel Hanukkah.*

Blessed are you, God, ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments and commanded us to kindle the light of Hanukkah.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בְּיָמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה.

*Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha'olam,
she'asah nisim la'avoteinu bayamim hahem bazman hazeh.*

Blessed are You, God, ruler of the universe, who performed miracles for our ancestors in those days at this season.

On the first night only:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעְנוּ לְזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה.

*Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha'olam,
shehechyanu vekiyemanu vehigiyanu lazman hazeh.*

Blessed are You, God, ruler of the universe, who has kept us in life and sustained us and brought us to this season.

מַעֲזוֹ צוֹר יְשׁוּעָתִי לָךְ נֶאֱדָה לְשִׁבְחֵךְ / תִּכּוֹן בֵּית תְּפִלָּתִי וְשָׁם תּוֹדֶה נִזְבַּח /
לְעֵת תִּכְיֶין מִטְּבַח מִצַּר הַמְּנַבֵּחַ / אֲזָ אֶגְמֹר בְּשִׁיר מְזֻמּוֹר חֲנֻכַּת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ.

Mighty rock of my salvation, to praise You is a delight / Restore my house of prayer and there we will bring a thanksgiving offering / When you will prepare the destruction for the blaspheming foe / Then I will complete the dedication of the altar with songs and hymns.

הַנִּירוֹת הַלְלוּ אֲנוּ מִדְּלִיקָה עַל הַנְּסִים וְעַל הַנִּפְלְאוֹת וְעַל הַתְּשׁוּעוֹת וְעַל הַמַּלְחָמוֹת
שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בְּיָמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה עַל יְדֵי כְּהֵנִיךְ הַקְּדוּשִׁים וְכָל שְׂמוֹנֵת יָמֵי חֲנֻכָּה
הַנִּירוֹת הַלְלוּ קִדְּשׁ הֵם וְאִין לָנוּ רְשׁוֹת לְהַשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בָּהֶם אֲלֵא לְרִאוֹתָם בְּלִבְד כְּדִי לְהוֹדוֹת
וְלִהְלֵל לְשִׁמְךָ הַגָּדוֹל עַל נִסִּיךָ וְעַל נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ וְעַל יְשׁוּעָתֶךָ.

We light these candles because of the miracles and the wonders, because of the salvations and the battles, that You performed for our ancestors in those days at this season through Your holy priests. And during all eight days of Hanukkah these candles are sacred and we may not use them for any purpose other than to look at them in order to thank and to praise Your great name, because of Your miracles, Your wonders, and Your salvation.

First Night: Rabbi David Hoffman, Vice Chancellor and Chief Advancement Officer

Our rabbis taught: when the first man saw the daylight hours were becoming shorter and shorter, he said, "Woe is me! Perhaps because I have sinned, the world is becoming dark around me and is returning to chaos. This is the death sentence declared upon me by Heaven!" He sat for eight days in fasting and prayer. After the winter solstice when he saw the days becoming longer and longer, he said, "This is simply the way of the world!" He went and made an eight-day festival (BT Avodah Zarah 8a).

ת"ר: לפי שראה אדם הראשון יום שמתמעט והולך, אמר: אוילי, שמא בשביל שסרחתי עולם חשוך בעדי וחוזר לתוהו ובוהו, וזו היא מיתה שנקנסה עלי מן השמים, עמד וישב ח' ימים בתענית [ובתפלה], כיון שראה תקופת טבת וראה יום שמאריך והולך, אמר: מנהגו של עולם הוא, הלך ועשה שמונה ימים טובים.



Hanukkah has, in its distant past, the most universal of messages. It is a holiday about experiencing fear, vulnerability, and darkness and not being consumed. It is a holiday that reminds us that light and security will return again, as sure as we know darkness will return. These are the cycles of life. The challenge is remembering that the darkness will, in fact, retreat. So this too, like the story of the oil, is a story of profound faith.

What can each of us do so that we are not consumed by our fears?

Second Night: Rabbi Matthew Berkowitz, Director of Israel Programs

To whom may Abraham be likened? To a king's friend, who saw the king walking about in dark alleys and began lighting the way for him through a window. When the king looked up and saw him, he said: instead of lighting the way for me from a distance, come out and light the way for me in my very presence. So too did God say to Abraham (Genesis Rabbah 30:10).

ולמה אברהם דומה לאוהבו של מלך, שראה את המלך מהלך במבואות האפלים, הציץ אוהבו והתחיל מאיר עליו דרך החלון, הציץ המלך וראה אותו, אמר לו עד שאתה מאיר לי דרך חלון, בא והאיר לפני, כך אמר הקב"ה לאברהם.



Abraham, a human being, leads the way for God. He walks before God and creates his own light before God. That is the truest light of redemption—when we as human beings light the way for God.

What can we do to "light the way" towards a better world?

Third Night: Rabbi Mychal Springer, Director, Center for Pastoral Education

The House of Shammai say: on the first day [of Hanukkah] one lights eight, from then on, one fewer each day. And the House of Hillel say: on the first day one lights one, from then on, one more each day (BT Shabbat 21a)

בית שמאי אומרים: יום ראשון מדליק שמנה, מכאן ואילך פוחת והולך; ובית הלל אומרים: יום ראשון מדליק אחת, מכאן ואילך מוסיף והולך.



For many of us who suffer... the reality of darkness can't be ignored ... In being with one another in community and not being abandoned in darkness, new possibilities do emerge. In a sense, we need both the descent into darkness of Beit Shammai and the ascent into light of Beit Hillel to come together in our hearts to make a whole that is Hanukkah.

What can you do to support people close to you who are struggling?

Fourth Night: Rabbi Judith Hauptman, E. Billi Ivry Professor of Talmud and Rabbinic Culture

Our Rabbis teach: it is appropriate to place the Hanukkah lamp outside one's door. If one lives in an upper storey, one places it at the window facing a public thoroughfare. (BT Shabbat 21b)

תנו רבנן: נר חנוכה מצוה להניחה על פתח ביתו מבחוץ. אם היה דר בעלייה מניחה בחלון הסמוכה לרשות הרבים.



The social and religious context in which Jews lived had an impact on the development of Jewish ritual. ... Jews lived in Babylonia amongst Zoroastrians and a central feature of the Zoroastrian religion is holy fire, especially visible at this dark time of year. It is very likely that the Rabbis who developed the rules of the public display of Hanukkah lamps wanted to make sure that Jews were not drawn to the Zoroastrian fire celebrations and were lighting the Hanukkah lamps.

How can we ensure that Hanukkah measures up to other seasonal holidays?

Fifth Night: Rabbi Sarit Horwitz, The Rabbinical School (Class of 2015)

Rashi on "outside" (from yesterday's text): In order to publicize the miracle.

מבחוץ: משום פרסומי ניסא



The underlying message of that miracle is actually about the ability to practice an uninhibited Judaism, a type of religious expression that's unhindered by both outside powers and internal self-consciousness. ... It's good to be different. It's good to publicize your individuality and be proud of traditions that not everyone might have. And that's a message we should definitely share with our neighbors.

What Jewish traditions or values do you want to share with your neighbors?