

CHANUKKAH: LIGHT AND DARKNESS

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Darkness. The heart of darkness. We have just concluded Chanukkah, the darkest time of the year. We kindle lights and remind ourselves of the hope for light in the face of darkness.

Darkness is built into the foundation of the universe. Listen to these opening words of the book of Bereshit, the story of creation- "Breshit barah Elohim et hashamayim v'et ha-aretz. V'ha-aretz haytah tohu vavohu, v'choshech al pnai t'hom- When God began to create the heaven and the earth, the earth was unformed and void, and there was darkness on the face of the deep." Darkness was there from the beginning. Darkness is a fundamental part of life. Bereshit seems to be telling us that darkness is inevitable, unavoidable. We can't escape from the dark times in life. We can't escape from the darkness within ourselves.

And then- "Vayomer Elohim- y'hee or; vay'hee or!- and God said, Let there be light- and there was light!" Light is not there from the beginning, but God creates light as the very first aspect of creation. We, who are made in the divine image, can- must!- create light. Clearly, the world is incomplete without light, and we as individuals need to bring light into our lives and into the world. We read in Proverbs 20:27, "Ner Adonai nishmat adam- our soul is the candle, the light of God." When we connect on the deepest soul level, we allow our inner light to shine.

Shabbat begins with lighting lights. However dark our week has been, we light the Shabbat candles. We speak of "making Shabbas," we recognize that Shabbat does not just happen without effort. We acquire special foods and we make time to be with family and community. We reflect on our week and we let it go. We slow down. We breathe. We rest. These things do not come easily to us.

Darkness comes to each of our lives. Darkness is part of the world. Thank God we have Shabbat each week, an opportunity to challenge the darkness with light.