

Torah Musing on Isaiah 9:1

העם ההלכים בחשך ראו אור גדול

The People Walking in Darkness Have Seen a Great Light



Hanukkah, a minor non-biblical festival celebrates the Hasmonean victory against the Seleucid empire and the recapture and re-dedication of the Temple (II Maccabees 10). The well-known narrative of the menorah oil lasting for eight days although it was only sufficient for one, is a much latter Talmudic Aggadah (lore) addition to the story (מגילת תענית Megillah Ta'anit Kiselev 7-8 and BT Shabbat 21b). With this

rabbinic reinterpretation Hanukkah was transformed into a celebration (triumph) of light.

Hanukkah, also known as *the festival of light* (25th- of Kislev- 2 Teveth), always occurs during the darkest time of the year. While it occasionally includes the actual winter solstice (the longest night of the year), it always includes ראש חודש טבת - the new moon of Tevet. This new moon is not the longest night of the year but it is the *moonless* night that occurs closest to the winter solstice, thereby making it the longest darkest night of the year. Annually as we commemorate the festival of Hanukkah, we are literally *walking in the dark* but as we light the נר של חנוכה - *Hanukkah candle*, we create light into the world.

As the people of Isaiah of Jerusalem's era (I Isaiah) confronted the darkness of the Assyrian conquest of Israelite territory and the Syro-Ephramite pressure on Judah, what was the light to which he referred? Was it the *light/realization* that they could reverse the dire political situation if they heeded his warnings? In our era how do we heed Isaiah's warnings? During the two weeks leading up to Hanukkah it is a tradition in my home to transform the house and the Shabbat table (see picture above) into a showcase of light. Following the principle laid down by Hillel (the Nasi/head who along with Shammai was the last of the zugot/pairs), each day we *add* illumination to our home light extravaganza.

מְעַלֵּין בְּקִדְּוֵי שָׁמַיִם וְאֵין מוֹרִידִין

One elevates to a higher level in matters of sanctity and one does not downgrade.

(BT. שבת כ"א ב: Shabbat 21b)

During this dark season of the year, every time my family members walk by and see the lights, we are visually reminded of our obligation to bring holiness and *light* into the world. This myriad of lights are merely symbolic representations of what we should be doing. The real challenge of Hanukkah is not to literally light more candles but metaphorical to bring even more light, holiness, compassion, and righteousness into the world. How do we accomplish this? We send anonymous gifts to those whom we know and to some that we do not know. We spend more time with those who are homebound or otherwise incapacitated. We call people with whom we may have lost contact and volunteer our time and services to organizations. We increase our charitable giving and we remind our friends and loved ones in words and deeds that we love them and that they are appreciated. We are kinder, smile often, offer many sincere complements, say thank you frequently and act and speak with love, mercy, and compassion.

As we walk in this season of physical deep darkness, let us illuminate our world with spiritual light, holiness, and good deeds.

העם ההלכים בחשך ראו אור גדול

The People Walking in Darkness Have Seen a Great Light (Isaiah 9:1 MT)

May The Light Shining in the Darkness Be Your Light

שבת שלום מביתנו לביתך

Shabbat Shalom From Our House to Your House

Rabbi Malchah