



TWO HOLIDAYS OF LIGHT

As winter proceeds, the day begins to get shorter. It is often still dark when we wake up in the morning and it is usually dark by the time we arrive home. Some find the darkness of winter serene. It feels quieter outside before the sun rises. Many find it somewhat somber; winter brings a melancholy, a longing for the light. And at the heart of Chanukah is a lesson on how we react to the darkness.

The first time the day grew shorter and darkness grew longer is also the first story of anxiety. As Adam HaRishon saw the days growing shorter and shorter, the Talmud explains (*Avodah Zarah* 8a), he became nervous. “Woe is me,” he said, “perhaps because I sinned the world is becoming dark around me and will return to the primordial state of *to’hu v’vohu*, chaos and disorder.” The first darkness of winter, Adam HaRishon thought the world was ending. Finally, as the days began to grow longer, he was put at ease. The Talmud explains:

כיון שראה תקופת טבת וראה יום שמאריך והולך אמר מנהגו של עולם הוא הלך ועשה שמונה ימים טובים לשנה האחרת עשאן לאלו ולאלו ימים טובים הוא קבעם לשם שמים והם קבעום לשם עבודת כוכבים.

Once he saw that the season of Tevet, i.e., the winter solstice, had arrived, and saw that the day was progressively lengthening after the solstice, he said: Clearly, the days become shorter and then longer, and this is the order of the world. He went and observed a festival for eight days. Upon the next year, he observed both these eight days on which he had fasted on the previous year, and these eight days of his celebration, as days of festivities. He, Adam, established these festivals for the sake of Heaven, but they, the gentiles of later generations, established them for the sake of idol worship.

Adam HaRishon created the first eight-day holiday in the winter in gratitude for the lengthening presence of the sun. Only later was this holiday, so to speak, co-opted by idolators as a festival celebrating the sun itself.

It is not hard to see the parallels to Chanukah in this story. Like Chanukah, this initial holiday was eight days long. And, like Chanukah, the holiday established by Adam HaRishon was in celebration of light. Yet, Adam HaRishon’s holiday was co-opted by pagans while Chanukah remains a quintessential Jewish holiday. What

is the difference between these two celebrations?

The essential question raised by these two holidays is how one responds to darkness. Adam HaRishon waited for the days to grow longer, while Chanukah celebrates our human capacity to spread light. Moreover, the holiday of Adam HaRishon revolved around the solstice, the sun, while Chanukah is a lunar holiday. The sun shines, the moon reflects. One might say that the message of Chanukah is that even in the absence of a light source, we can generate light by reflecting the illumination of divinity onto the world. We do not wait for the sun; rather, like the moon, we reflect the light of Hashem. Chanukah is the rabbinic holiday that celebrates our ability to make light by bringing divinity into this darkened world.

There are two ways to react to the darkness of night: One can wait for the darkness to leave, or one can work to transform the darkness into light. Chanukah teaches us to not passively wait for the sun to rise, but to spread the light of God. Each candle, each person, illuminating a dark world with God’s holy light.

LEARN MORE ABOUT CHANUKAH AT

yutorah.org/moadim-u-zmanim/holidays/chanukah



CORE TORAH VALUES

Yeshiva University is a unique ecosystem of educational institutions and resources that prepares the next generation of leaders with Jewish values and market-ready skills to achieve great success in their personal and professional lives, endowing them with both the will and wherewithal to transform the Jewish world and broader society for the better.

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TORAT EMET

אמת
TRUTH

We believe in **truth**, and humanity's ability to discover it.

The pursuit of truth has always been the driving force behind advances in human understanding, from Socrates' wanderings through the streets of Athens to the innovations of the Industrial Revolution. People of faith, who believe in a divine author of Creation, believe that the act of discovery is sacred, whether in the realm of philosophy, physics, economics or the study of the human mind.

The Jewish people in particular affirm that beginning with the Revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai, God entrusted eternal teachings and values to us that we must cherish and study diligently above all else, for they represent the terms of the special covenant that God made with us. All people, regardless of their faith background, should value the accumulation of knowledge because it is the way to truth and a prerequisite to human growth.

TORAT CHAIM

חיים
LIFE

We believe in bringing values to **life**.

Jewish thought asserts that truth is made available to human beings not simply so that they can marvel at it but also so that they can use it. Students studying literature, computer science, law, psychology or anything else are expected to take what they learn and implement it within their own lives as well as apply it to the real world around them.

When people see a problem that needs addressing, their responsibility is to draw upon the truths they uncovered during their studies in finding a solution. They must live truth in the real world, not simply study it in the classroom.

TORAT ADAM

אדם
INFINITE HUMAN WORTH

We believe in the **infinite worth** of each and every human being.

Judaic tradition first introduced to the world the radical proposition that each individual is created in the divine image and accordingly possesses incalculable worth and value.

The unique talents and skills each individual possesses are a reflection of this divine image, and it is therefore a sacred task to hone and develop them. The vast expansive human diversity that results from this process is not a challenge but a blessing. Each of us has our own path to greatness.

TORAT CHESED

חסד
COMPASSION

We believe in the responsibility to reach out to others in **compassion**.

Even as we recognize the opportunities of human diversity, Jewish tradition emphasizes the importance of common obligations. In particular, every human being is given the same responsibility to use his or her unique gifts in the service of others; to care for their fellow human beings; to reach out to them in thoughtfulness, kindness and sensitivity; and to form a connected community.

TORAT ZION

ציון
REDEMPTION

We believe that **humanity's purpose** is to transform our world for the better and move history forward.

In Jewish thought, the concept of redemption represents the conviction that while we live in an imperfect world, we have a responsibility to strive toward its perfection. Regardless of a person's personal convictions about whether social perfection is attainable or even definable, it is the act of working toward it that gives our lives meaning and purpose. This common striving is an endeavor that brings all of humanity together.

The Jewish people's task to build up the land of Israel into an inspiring model society represents this effort in microcosm. But it is part of a larger project that includes all of humankind. If the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice, then redemption represents our responsibility to work together in the service of God to move history forward.



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