

Banishing or Embracing Darkness

There is a popular children's Chanukkah song in Israel, that goes, *Banu choshech l'garesh, b'yadeinu ohr va'eish. . .*" which, roughly translated would go: "We have come to banish dark/light and fire are in our hands. . ." the song continues, emphatically exhorting us each to be a little light, driving away the darkness.

In recent years, several of my colleagues have sought to rewrite the song, for a few reasons. Though music, literature and religious texts are replete with the casual association between light and good and darkness and evil, in this day and age, many argue that the racial problematics of the "light" seeking to banish the "dark," in this song are inexcusable. But deeper than that is the acknowledgement that light and darkness are intertwined; that as in as much as light literally brings comfort, warmth, familiarity and darkness is challenging, mysterious and unknown; we need both in our lives.

One of the laws of Hanukkah in the Mishneh Torah (Laws of Esther and Hanukkah 4:4), states that if multiple wicks in one pot of oil can join together (as in a Havdalah candle), they become "like a bonfire" and no longer fulfill the mitzvah of Hanukkah. Part of the Hanukkah experience is seeing distinct flames, interspersed with darkness. Any of us who have lit Hanukkiyot on Chanukkah can probably relate to the magic of watching the interweave of light and darkness.

You're receiving this newsletter at a time of increasing darkness: the literal darkness of lengthening nights as Daylight Savings Times ends, and the metaphoric darkness of the unknown. We do not know what will unfold in our country in these next few months, but it will probably bring new challenges and demand new obligations from us.

This is not a darkness we can or should seek to banish. We learn from embracing the challenges and mysteries of the moment. As we face the next few months, we'll embrace the familiar, with holiday programs and fun interactive educational events. We will also offer programming that encourages us to rise to the new challenges of this moment, embracing light and darkness together. I hope you will participate in both.