

Hanukkah: The Power of Miracles

for Sunset December 1 through Sunset December 9, 2010

At this time of year, when the sun is most hidden, the holiday of Hanukkah celebrates the rays of hope and light. Indeed, the physical darkness of this time of year can be a metaphor for illness. At such times, we yearn for the sun, and the light and warmth that it provides. Often, it is through simple miracles that we are able to feel the warmth of hope and light.

The story of Hanukkah as it first appears in the Talmud has been passed down throughout the generations: after the defeat of the Greeks, the Macabees set out to clean the Temple in Jerusalem of its defilement and rededicate it to God. There is only enough oil for the *ner tamid* (eternal light) to last one day. Yet the oil lasts an astonishing eight days.

Often, when we think of miracles, we think of grandiose incidents, particularly when it comes to stories from the tradition: the parting of the Sea of Reeds, Moses and the rock that gushes water, Jonah and the whale that swallows him whole, only to throw him up onto dry land. Yet we are reminded that "When events appear to take place at just the right moment-when a person or object materializes on the scene at the precise instant to meet the critical need...-this can also be regarded as a miracle" (Anchor Bible Dictionary, volume IV, page 847).

In our rational 21st century world, we tend to deny the power of miracles. Yet, the ability to find the miracles in our daily lives can turn darkness into light. Sometimes we are not aware of these miracles. Typically, it is only in retrospect, if at all, that we recognize there was something miraculous in a moment or an event in our lives. Sometimes the greatest miracle of all is the simple miracle of being remembered by or remembering someone at a particularly dark moment or being provided with or providing a form of sustenance (medical, physical, spiritual or emotional) when it feels as though the light is about to be extinguished.

May this Hanukkah season bring simple miracles and the warmth and radiance of light to all those who are suffering and in pain. May each of us have the opportunity in our own life to be both a receiver and conveyer of miracles. And may the power of miracles chase away the darkness, as the cycle of the sun brings renewed warmth and light to the world.

Excerpts from © Rabbi Janet Offel in collaboration with the United Jewish Federation of San Diego, and the Jewish Healing Center, a program of Jewish Family Service, in collaboration with Bay Area Jewish Healing Center.

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