<u>Hanukkah: Líghts ín the Darkness</u>

Shalom!

The Winter Holiday season is challenging for anyone who is depressed or coping with illness, and certainly most difficult for those who are bereaved and mourning. The days are turning shorter and colder. It seems like everyone else is content and happy, if not thriving and partying, while we may well feel alone, with little to celebrate, collapsing under our burdens, left out in the cold. Past losses, past grief may resurface as family and friend traditionally gather to eat, drink, and be joyous. It is a time when we, those who are ill and bereaved, painfully recognize our brokenness and our need to be healed.

Towards this end, we offer you some Hanukkah resources for healing -- psalms, prayers, wise sayings and stories -- that may bring insight and wisdom, spiritual comfort and sustenance. These different Jewish gems can be used in different ways, as helpful and inspiring to you: as a daily meditation, as a *kavvanah* (focal intention) when lighting the candles, as a special trigger for shared memories or discussion, and so on. You may want to combine these with the rituals of candlelighting, singing, traditional holiday foods, studying, etc. Do what is best for your setting, your situation, and your sensibilities. Feel free to visit our website at <u>www.ncjh.org</u> for other Jewish healing and spiritual resources.

May this Hanukah season illuminate our lives with blessings of hope, love and courage to face the future.

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 the darkness that often envelopes us at times of illness and loss of a loved one, when the world sometimes feels dark and cold. At such times, we yearn for the sun, and the light and warmth that it provides. Often, it is through simple and unrecognized miracles that we are able to feel the warmth of hope and light.

Rabbi Rafael Goldstein, Torah Reflections... Bay Area and San Diego Jewish Healing,2003

Light is perceived only out of darkness.

Hasdai, Ben Ha Melekh v'HaNazir, ca. 1230, chapter 18

Hanukkah is not just some celebration of miracles performed in the past. Neither is it just a commemoration of righteous people who lived in the distant past. It is a guiding light for people from all walks of life, from all eras in time, to see through the darkness of their personal lives and to become a part of history. It is encouragement for those who face insurmountable odds as a result of personal history. It is a declaration that God will perform miracles for us when we courageously stand up for battle. It is inspiration for us to be our own Maccabees in waging our inner battle. It is also the knowledge that God is with us, even when we lose the battle.

Chanukah with Rebbe Nachman of Breslov by Yehoshua Starrett, Breslov Research Institute

Kindle your own candle. Ignite your soul. Chanukah is your story. *Likutey Halakhot, Shiluakh HaKen* 5:8



A little light will dispel much darkness.

Eilenburg, Tzeda laDerekh, 1623

"Blessed are You Adonai, our God, Sovereign of the Universe, who has kept us alive, who has sustained us and brought us to this time." Sheheheyanu Blessing, said on first night of Hanukkah

Reb Yisroel kindled the wick and there in a barracks at Bergen Belsen, the light began to burn. Afterwards, one of the Jews came up to Reb Yisroel with a question.

"Rebbe," the man continued, " when hundreds of dead Jewish bodies are lying just a few feet away from this menorah and thousands more are being massacred

every day, should we recite that third blessing and thank God for keeping us alive at a time like this?"

"I had the same question," the Bluzhover Rebbe replied. "That's why I stopped before reciting the final blessing. I wanted to ask the advice of my fellow Rabbis to see if it was, indeed, permissible to recite such a blessing during these terrible times. But when I turned and saw the



faces of all the Jews eagerly crowding around me-when I saw their eyes alive with fire and love for this mitzvah – I knew that not only was it permissible, it was obligatory!"

"After being privileged to see with my own eyes," the Rebbe continued, "that the faith and the fervor of the Jewish People still lives – despite all that we have endured – how can I not thank God for keeping me alive to see this time."

Excerpt from *The Candle of God is the Soul of Man*, Libi Astair @2001 (libia@netvision.net.il)

R. Alexandria on concluding his prayer added the following: May it be Thy will, O Lord our God, to station us in an illumined corner and do not station us in a darkened corner, and let not our heart be sick nor our eyes darkened. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot17a

A Psalm for Hanukah **Psalm 30**

Translated © Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, CSW, 1997

When Adam saw the days getting gradually shorter, he said: "Woe is me, perhaps because I have sinned, the world around me is being darkened and returned to its state of chaos and confusion! This, then, is the kind of death to which I have been sentenced from Heaven!" So he began keeping an eight-day fast. But as he observed the winter equinox and noted the days getting increasingly longer he said: "This is the world's course," and he set forth to keep an eight-day festivity.

Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah 8a

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Way back, Jewish scholars debated whether to commemorate the miracle by lighting eight candles and then progressively light fewer and fewer candles (which would, after all, reflect the diminishment of that ancient cruse of oil) or to light one candle and then add lights progressively during the ensuing week. The approach that won out, of course, is the latter approach, to go from 1 to 8. Why?

Rather than curse the darkness, we <u>seek to fan the sparks of light</u>---to find blessing where we can, locate community where it may exist, to treasure moments of joy where we may. A person can't be asked to suddenly "jump" to 8 lights of joy, but we can help each other build from 1 to 8.

Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, CSW, "Notes on Hanukkah," Kislev-Tevet 5758/1998 (NCJH)

Sixty: A Song for Hanukah Your hand holds the miracles, Outstretched, Fingers curved, You bring it before your eyes, Gleaming, infinite, wonders.

Before You, all eyes are lowered, Hands shielding the radiance of Your might; Still You hold out the miracles, separating the strands To stream through Your fingers

Almighty and Marvelous One. You offer us the glance at wonder, These shining threads that plait us up In Your plan for the world.

Almighty and Marvelous One. You call us to take up the light, To push aside our spirits' darkness For Your Name's sake.

At this season, the miracles appeared. At this season, we must work for miracles.

You open Your hand Not to pour the light upon our heads, But to offer it as a beacon That we might grasp it and move forward. The National Center for Jewish Healing, a program of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, provides consultation, publications, conferences and information and referral to Jewish communal organizations seeking to address the spiritual needs of Jews during times of illness and loss. It currently assists in the development of Jewish healing programs in more than 30 cities in the U.S. and Canada.

Visit <u>www.ncjh.org</u> and <u>www.jcprograms.org</u> for more information and access to other resources to help sustain the spirit in challenging times.

The Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services is one of the nation's leading voluntary mental health and social service agencies. JBFCS provides a comprehensive network of mental health and social services to promote well-being, resilience and self-sufficiency for individuals and families in need in the New York metropolitan area. As leaders in the field of human services, we proudly serve people of all faiths, races and cultures.

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You open Your hand in this dark season As we warm each other and praise Your Name.

Debbie Perlman, Flames to Heaven: New Psalms for Healing and Praise, page 75

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