

## Making Miracles in Light of Hanukkah

Judah and his brothers said: “Now that our enemies are crushed, let us go up and purify and dedicate the sanctuary.” The entire army gathered together and went up to Mount Zion. They saw the sanctuary desolated and the altar profaned, the gates burned up, and weeds growing in the courts as in a forest or as on one of the mountains, and priests’ chambers torn down....

They took counsel as to what they should do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been defiled. A good plan occurred to them namely, to tear it down lest it become a reproach to them because the heathen had defiled it. So they pulled down the altar and put away the stones in the Temple mount, in a suitable place, until a prophet should come to decide what to do with them. They took whole stones, according to the Torah, and constructed a new altar like the former one. They built the sanctuary and the interior of the Temple, and sanctified the courts, made new holy vessels, and brought the menorah, the altar of incense, and the table into the Temple. They burned incense on the altar and lit the lights of the Menorah so that they would shed light in the Temple. They put loaves of bread upon the table, hung up the curtains and finished all the work which they had undertaken.

They also adorned the front of the Temple with golden crowns and small shields and rededicated the gates and the priests’ chambers and fitted them with doors. Thus there was great joy among the people, and the reproach caused by the heathen was removed. Judah and his brothers and the entire congregation of Israel decreed that the days of the dedication of the altar should be kept with gladness and joy at their due season, year after year, for eight days from the twenty-fifth of the month of Kislev.

*(1 Maccabees 4:36-51, 57-59)*

And why Hanukkah? Our Rabbis taught: on the twenty-fifth of Kislev we begin the eight days of Hanukkah.... For when the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oils therein, and when the Hasmoneans prevailed against them and defeated them, they searched and found only one jar of oil deposited with the seal of the High Priest, but which contained only enough oil for one day’s lighting. Yet, a miracle occurred and they lit the menorah with it for eight days. The following year these days were appointed a Festival, complete with the reciting of Hallel-praise Psalms and thanksgiving.

*(Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 21b)*

The miracle of Jewish spiritual survival may best be described by our people’s strength to live without guarantees of success.

The Hanukkah lights encourage one to trust human beginnings and to focus one’s passions and efforts on whatever opportunities are available at the present moment. One ought to pour infinite yearnings even into small vessels. The strength to continue and to persevere grows by virtue of the courage to initiate a process by lighting the first flame....

The Hanukkah lamp burned for eight days because of those who were prepared to have it burn for only one day.

*David Hartman, in A Different Light, p. 196*

---

Promoting the vital dialogue between classical Jewish texts & lived experience

[www.sichaconversation.org](http://www.sichaconversation.org)

**שיחה** *Sicha*  
continuing the conversation