In the inner life dimension of the Jewish tradition, we find a focus during Hanukkah on the metaphor of the oil lamp, not on the Maccabean Rebellion against the Syrian Hellenists.

The oil lamp has three parts: the oil, the wick, and the light. The Hasidic masters use Proverbs 6:23 for their teaching on the oil lamp during Hanukkah. The verse reads, “Ner mitzvah veTorah ohr,” “The mitzvah is the lamp, and the light is the Torah.”

In the Hasidic tradition, the oil stands for the soul, especially the force in the soul that seeks to radiate its light into the world of darkness. The wick of the lamp draws up the oil so that it can radiate into a world of darkness. The potential in the soul to bring light to the world is called the “ohr ganuz,” the “hidden light.” We have to bring forth the hidden light. How?

The mitzvah is the deed that lights the wick and draws the soul’s radiance out. I don’t think of a mitzvah as only being one of the commandments of God given in the Five Books of Moses to the Israelites.

The word “mitzvah” is from the Hebrew word root “tz-v-h,” pronounced as “tzavah,” and has the sense of giving an order. For example, a “tz’va’ah” is a will, as in a “last will and testament.” My favorite rendering of the word “mitzvah” is “a sacred urging from God to think, speak, or act in a certain way.”

We can go from day to day and week to week, and not think about the sacred. You can even be reading scripture, or attending church or synagogue, but not be wired into the holy. Then suddenly, or intentionally, you can feel the Presence flowing into you.

There are other moments when you are not experiencing God’s presence, but suddenly you know, in your soul, that you have a duty to think, feel, speak, and act in certain way.

A duty to think a certain way? Yes. We are commanded in the Torah, for example, not to hate or bear grudges. A duty to feel a certain way? Yes. We are commanded in the Torah, for example, to feel compassion for the widow, poor, orphan, and stranger, to love God and love our neighbor.

We are commanded not to do many things that cause harm, including the commandment not to use language to hurt or disparage others. We are commanded to be fair and honest, and to judge others with righteousness.
Every commandment that we think, feel, speak, and act in a certain way points to the resistance within us to doing the right thing; otherwise, there would be no commandments.

In the inner life tradition, this struggle with what we ought to do and the resistance against that is understood as an inner war, a war between light and darkness that is waged in the deep chambers of every human being.

I might find myself, for example, working with a couple where one person is irascible and functions at a fairly low level with lots of anger and punitiveness. The other person has decided to evolve away from pettiness but starts to resent that they must be the tolerant and understanding one. The tolerant one complains, “It is not fair that my spouse is the angry and mean one, but I have to do most of the work.”

Resentment is a feeling that saps our energy. Someone must do something for us to feel better, and we refuse to feel better until they do. The list of thoughts and feelings that sap our spiritual energy is many cubits long. Each item on the list is waging war against our well-being.

Another person, from teens to elder years, finds their life devoid of meaning. The idea of putting in all the spiritual work needed to find meaning and purpose, and even joy, seems overwhelming. They don’t know where or how to begin.

During Hanukkah, we phrase the question this way: Do we want to rededicate this relationship to what is good and beautiful? Will I do what it takes to fight against the inner darkness?

For those truly dedicated to bringing forth the light, we must find new energy every single day. We might feel we only have enough energy for one day – hence the beauty of “one day at a time.” Light the candle for today.

It might be a while before others join in the struggle against the darkness of relationships wasted away. It might be a while before you wake up one day with your eyes enlightened.

It is true that life is not fair and that we sometimes can’t find the light to guide our path. It is also true that right now, you are capable of the work of driving out some of the darkness in whatever situation you find yourself. Maybe only one single candle in a vast void, but there is a candle waiting to be lit.

In tough moments, we must do two things: First, find the energy within to light the wick and draw up the oil, perhaps only enough for one day. We also must find the way of thinking, feeling, speaking, and acting that will light the wick.

Think of someone else, and how you can help them. Forgive someone in your heart. Speak of appreciation and praise to another. Perform an act of service; sacrifice a need of yours for the need of another.

There are countless sacred urgings from the Divine to light the wick, to bring the radiance of the soul into a world of darkness. You have eight days to figure out what you are going to do next.
In this special Haftarah for the first Shabbat of Chanukah, an angel of God speaks to the prophet Zechariah and gives him a vision. The vision he sees has at least three elements directly related to Chanukah. First, Zechariah sees the rebuilding of the Temple and the re-establishment of pure Priests doing service to God. Second, he is shown a menorah, though it is the seven-branched menorah, not the nine-branched chanukiyah. Finally, the angel reminds Zechariah that the people are delivered not by their own strength, but by God’s. The following is an excerpt from this Haftarah.

Zechariah 4:1-6

A. The angel who talked with me came back and woke me as a man is wakened from sleep. He said to me, “What do you see?” And I answered, “I see a menorah all of gold, with a bowl above it. The lamps on it are seven in number, and the lamps above it have seven pipes; and by it are two olive trees, one on the right of the bowl and one on its left.” I, in turn, asked the angel who talked with me, “What do those things mean, my lord?” “Do you not know what those things mean?” asked the angel who talked with me, and I said, “No, my lord.” Then he explained to me as follows: “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might, nor by power, but My spirit,’ said the Lord of Hosts.”
Happy Birthday...
Rabbi Mordecai Finley on December 24
Wendy Wyman-McGinty on December 25
Leeor Mitchell on December 27
Sonya Sultan on December 29
Randi Letendre on December 29

Happy Anniversary...
Erika Nadir and Sam Maizel on December 27

Welcome New Member
Jason Szefteł

Mazal Tov
Elsa and Jerome Dahan on the birth of their second child, Charlotte Dahan, on November 19.

This Week We Remember...
Margaret Sage, mother of Diana Guth, on December 25.
Milton Chortkoff, husband of Edythe Chortkoff and father of Beth Shader, on December 28.
Sarina Halevy, grandmother of Diane Alvy-Halevy, on December 28.

Condolences To...
Barbro and Sheldon Klausner on the passing of Sheldon’s sister on December 16.
Susie and Gene Miller on the passing of Susie’s father, Admiral Richard C. Macke, on Wednesday, December 7.
Claudia and Steven Meyer on the passing of Claudia’s mother, Yvonne Dorothy Bugh, on Friday, November 25.

Happy Birthday...
Rabbi Mordecai Finley on December 24
Wendy Wyman-McGinty on December 25
Leeor Mitchell on December 27
Sonya Sultan on December 29
Randi Letendre on December 29

Happy Anniversary...
Erika Nadir and Sam Maizel on December 27

Welcome New Member
Jason Szefteł

Mazal Tov
Elsa and Jerome Dahan on the birth of their second child, Charlotte Dahan, on November 19.

This Week We Remember...
Margaret Sage, mother of Diana Guth, on December 25.
Milton Chortkoff, husband of Edythe Chortkoff and father of Beth Shader, on December 28.
Sarina Halevy, grandmother of Diane Alvy-Halevy, on December 28.

Condolences To...
Barbro and Sheldon Klausner on the passing of Sheldon’s sister on December 16.
Susie and Gene Miller on the passing of Susie’s father, Admiral Richard C. Macke, on Wednesday, December 7.
Claudia and Steven Meyer on the passing of Claudia’s mother, Yvonne Dorothy Bugh, on Friday, November 25.

Please Note:
If you have something for the weekly update, material, as well as flyers, must be in the office by 4PM the preceding Monday!