

How Do 8 Days Become 2 months? The Month of Kislev and Operation Pillar of Defense.

The other night I noticed my neighbor had already turned on their Christmas lights. We haven't even bought our Thanksgiving turkey yet! Amazing how in some traditions one day can turn into 12 and then into more than 50! But why the rush?

On this first day of the month of Kislev, I thought about how Chanukah lasts only 8 days but spans two months. It begins on the 25th of Kislev and ends on the 3rd of Tevet. It is the only Jewish holiday of the year to straddle two months. Is there any significance to this?

The month we head into now is the darkest of our lunar calendar. The symbolism of our Chanukah lights coming at the darkest time of the year has been explained in many ways: the flames of courage scattering the shadows of oppression; the light of hope brightening the clouds of despair, the Torah shining through the fog of assimilation.

We kindle the first candle (on Saturday night, December 8th) during the darkest days of the month, and by the time the last candles are lit, the days are becoming (albeit by the tiniest of margins) longer and more full of light. Why do we light fewer candles during the darkest days and all of the candles during the "lighter" days?

Darkness and despair reflect feelings and circumstances that can't be artificially, forcefully or instantaneously resolved. They demand serious, deep and sometimes prolonged reflection in order to truly understand their import and their lessons. Being present to pain and suffering and working for their healing, on a personal or global level, demands careful attention with incremental growth in understanding so as to create sustained compassion and a more hopeful future.

Maybe that's why we light the fewest lights in the moment of the deepest darkness – to mirror this process of gradual but eventual enlightenment rather than instant, but fleeting, gratification -- something with which we are all too familiar.

And maybe that's why Chanukah straddles two months, to signify that this kind of measured growth promises to endure more reliably than forced or rushed responses.

As we pray for the safety of Israel's citizens and soldiers, and for responsible leadership in the face of the violence to fight for a just

resolution, we realize that immediate and decisive reaction to the threatening darkness of war and terrorism is critical. But about the darkness of hatred and the blindness of enmity, let us and our leaders take the time to think carefully and deeply, confronting the sources of the suffering and courageously kindling one light of hope at a time, illuminating the path to a vital State of Israel living securely and peacefully amongst her neighbors.