

A Star Wars Hannukah

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A long time ago in a place far, far away...

It is a period of civil war. A new government has declared the practice of the old faith a crime punishable by death, disbanding an ancient order of sages and sending many into exile. Rebel fighters, striking from a hidden base, have won their first major victory against the evil Empire, stirring a spirit of defiance among the populace. Out armed and vastly outnumbered, the ragtag band of rebels—aided by an all-powerful, all-permeating Force that binds together all life in the universe—remain the only hope for restoring peace and freedom to their people.

One could easily imagine these words scrolling at a slanted angle, from bottom to top, on a movie screen, like all beginnings to *Star Wars* films. These words are a forward to the stories about the battle between the Light Side and Dark Side, the powers that are driven by

compassion, mercy, hope, and benevolence or hatred, rage, fear, and aggression. They are also a description of our ancestors, the Maccabees, whose resilience and determination overcame the totalitarianism of the Seleucid Empire and whose belief in each other led to the great miracle of one night's worth of oil lighting the flames of the menorah for eight nights.

We live in a world torn by violence and pain, hatred and fear, divisiveness and discrimination, and are in the midst of a season when the darkness dims the light of day early. We are need of the Festival of Lights, and its symbolic reminder that we cannot allow the darkness to overwhelm us, to overshadow the power of the light.

The *Star Wars* universe is revolved around the Skywalker family and their constant internal battles between embracing the Light Side or Dark Side of the Force. Temptation to the Dark Side and its power is the driving force (pun intended) of the *Star Wars* narrative. Too often our feelings of greed, and hatred, and jealousy are barriers our better

judgement, and *Star Wars* shares with us the story of what happens when we allow these feelings to consume us.

Whether it be *Star Wars*, or the light symbolism found within Jewish tradition, we learn that to embrace light or darkness is a choice. We have the power to choose hope over desperation, peace over chaos, love over hatred. Our tradition is one that ask us to choose light, for the light given to us is the means by which we should see each other and interact with each other. To choose light is to choose that hope is always possible.

When moments of darkness occur in the world, we can choose to bring more darkness or challenge ourselves to go deep inside and find the light that we can bring out. It's not to say that we aren't allowed to feel certain dark feelings, but the key is to release it. Holding onto darkness, dwelling on it, amplifying it by putting it out there and letting others feed it won't do us any good. If we want to eliminate the darkness in this world, we won't do it by bringing more darkness. Let's be aware of what we put out there when dark moments do occur.

Miracles involving slow-burning oil aside, this is one of the core lessons we find in Chanukah: that it is always possible to bring light into the darkest moments in our lives. Rabbi Arthur Waskow explains it this way:

Hanukkah is the moment when light is born from darkness, hope from despair...The Maccabean revolt came at the darkest moment of Jewish history – when not only was a foreign king imposing idolatry, but large numbers of Jews were choosing to obey. The miracle at the Temple came at a moment of spiritual darkness – when even military victory had proven useless because the Temple could not be rededicated in the absence of the sacred oil. At the moment of utter darkness in Modi'in, Mattathias struck the spark of rebellion – and fanned it into flame. At the moment of utter darkness at the Temple, when it would have been rational to wait for more oil to be pressed and consecrated, the Jews ignored all reasonable reasons, and lit the little oil they had. ...Seen this way, Hanukkah can become a resource to help

us experience our moments of darkness whenever they occur throughout the year – and strike new sparks.

In *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, pirate and smuggler Maz Kanata says it best, “Close your eyes. Feel it. The light...it’s always been there. It will guide you.” We must light candles, candles of hope, and place those candles in our windows for everyone to see. In following the wisdom of the great sage Hillel, we must increase the number of candles each night, adding to the amount of light. We must use one candle to light another candle, spreading the light from person to person. We must react to the evil in the world not with more evil but with goodness, we must encounter the hatred with love. Deep in our hearts we must believe that the darkness will not last forever.