



# Growing in the Darkness

For many of us, Chanukah completes the cycle of “corona-chagim.” From when Purim started to be overshadowed by the pandemic back in March, we will have now experienced all of the *chagim* during the era of coronavirus. And perhaps Chanukah during these times is the most poignant of them all.

The story of Chanukah is one of the most positive and uplifting in our history. We were able to defeat the great military forces of the Seleucid Greeks, and maintain our identity and faith in the face of their cultural onslaught, against all odds. An unlikely victory that brought sparks of light to dark

times. Rav Assaf Bednarsh, RIETS Rosh Yeshiva at YU’s Gruss Kollel, ties this idea to the central miracle of the oil, the *pach haShemen* that continued to burn for eight days. The Hellenizers and Greeks believed that their new culture was destined to take over the world. The Jews had managed to light the scene of history for just one night, but their flame would then be extinguished and replaced by the lights of Greek culture.

However, the light of Torah and the Jewish people were destined to glow much longer than the Greeks thought they would. Though at the time it may have seemed that our lights would be

extinguished, they remained burning bright, glowing and growing.

This past year has brought much darkness to our people and to the world. We have experienced collective mourning and fear in a way we have not for many years. Yet Chanukah reminds us that even when we might not expect it, the light of the Torah and the Jewish people continues to burn.

Since March, Israel has had to close its borders to foreign citizens. Yet over this summer, it ensured that over 10,000 yeshiva and seminary students from *Chutz LaAretz* could enter *Eretz Yisrael* to learn Torah in our homeland. On a political level, in 2020, Israel has concluded more peace and normalization agreements with its Arab neighbors than in all the years since 1948.

We in the United States may have been unable to visit Israel in person in 2020, but the recent World Zionist Congress showed that Jews around the world remain as close as ever to our homeland, and that our Religious Zionist voice will continue to make a real impact on the future of the State of Israel. It may have been a dark year, but within it, the light of Jewish people and our Torah has continued to burn, *Baruch Hashem*.

Like the candles that increase in number every night of Chanukah, may we continue to be “*mosif veholech*,” to glow and to grow, and light up the darkness wherever it may lie.

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Photo courtesy of Rabbi Hillel van Leeuwen

Chanukah is about the freedom to be true to what we believe without denying the freedom of those who believe otherwise. It’s about lighting our candle, while not being threatened by or threatening anyone else’s candle.

