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**Chanukah:
Love, Light and Latkes**
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Why is this light different from all other lights?

We light Shabbat candles so that we may see one another at the table. We light a Havdallah candle to make a distinction between light and dark, and to reignite creative fire in the world. We light memorial candles to bring the inner spark of our loved one back into our lives. Jewish law permits us to use each of these lights for practical purposes as well. But the lights of our Hanukkah (the Hanukkah menorah) are simply for their own sake. Their light cannot be used for practical purposes.

But if the candle's light cannot be used, why do we care so much about exactly how we light? Shouldn't any light suffice? This is where the idea of *pirsumei nisa*, publicizing the miracle, comes in to play. We must light in such a way that others will see our lights. We must share our joy and miraculous freedom.

This reminds me of a story:

One day, a student asked their rabbi: "Rabbi, I know that to be Jewish is to have a special role, a special job in the world. Rabbi, what is my job as a Jew in the world?"

The rabbi, never one to answer directly, said: "Once upon a time, long before flashlights on smart phones or even any electricity—there was a person in every town who was responsible for lighting up the streets. On the street corners, lamps sat—ready to be lit each night as the sun began to set. And there was one person whose job it was to walk from street to street, from lamp to lamp, with a flame at the end of a long pole. Each evening this person would walk their route, lighting each and every lamp—no matter how cold it was, or how hard it was to reach."

"But, what if the lamp is in a desolate wilderness, far from everything and everyone," one of the students asked? The rabbi answered: "Then, too, it must be lit."

"And what if the lamp is in the middle of an ocean?" The rabbi smiled and said: "Then one must put on a bathing suit, jump into the water, and light it there. Without it, she said, there would be no light."

The student looked again at the rabbi and said: “Rabbi, I still don’t know the right answer. What is my job as a Jew in the world?”

The rabbi looked at her students and said: “You can be anything that you want to be. But no matter what you decide to do with your life, you must be a lamplighter on the streets of the world.”

(Adapted from a story attributed to the Lubavitcher Rebbe.)

This is what Hanukkah is all about, really.

The candles are beautiful. The doughnuts and latkes are yummy. The dreidel and gifts are fun.

But the essence of Hanukkah is about spreading light, as we read in Proverbs (6:23): “For the mitzva is a lamp and the Torah is light.”

Jews spread light every day of the year, that’s what it is to be a Jew always, but on Hanukkah we celebrate that light and show it off. The rest of the year our light is practical, but this week we’re not enjoying its practicality, we’re enjoying its pure existence – and we’re spreading the word.

This Hanukkah, as you share latkes and love, don’t forget to celebrate and embrace all the light you spread in this world.



Rabba Melissa Scholten-Gutierrez combines her personal, professional, and educational experiences to establish meaningful Jewish experiences and connections wherever she goes. She currently serves as the Community Camp Ambassador for the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta, working to increase the number of children attending Jewish overnight summer camp by stewarding a scholarship and incentives program, coordinating community marketing, and serving as a central camp resource. Rabba Melissa holds undergraduate degrees in Psychology & Social Behavior and Sociology from the University of California, Irvine and received a Masters in Social Work with a health care concentration from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.