



The Light We Bring

By Jeremy J. Fingerman

The Jewish community has certainly had more than its fair share of hardship in recent weeks. We remain stunned by the horrific shootings in Pittsburgh, the devastating fires of California, and the increasing tensions along Israel's borders. In these challenging times, however, I am inspired by the way our Jewish professionals and institutions have responded with indefatigable love and tireless support for the members of our community who need them most.

These leaders deserve our admiration and appreciation. They exemplify a love for community to which we should all aspire. Just as they've shown support for our Jewish community, we need to show our support for them.

Fortunately, when we light the menorah at the beginning of Chanukah this Sunday evening, we have the perfect opportunity to continue demonstrating our appreciation through the perfect symbol of Jewish resilience. I would like to propose an idea for immediate implementation. For each of the eight days of Chanukah, each one of us should seek out and thank one Jewish communal professional for their work. This could be a member of the clergy, a Federation executive, an educator or teacher, a social worker, a youth worker, a JCC or Hillel or camp director or staff member, a Foundation professional or administrator. Find someone who dedicates their vocation to bettering our Jewish community. Take a moment to express in your own words your appreciation for their work. Say thank you for a job well done and for always being there in times of need.

I reflect on how the shamash lights all the other candles on the menorah. In sharing its light with others, it provides illumination and warmth to others without diminishing its own flame. Our gratitude and love for our Jewish communal professionals and institutions should be like the shamash: generous, warm, and tireless.

Halakha (Jewish law) teaches that we are not permitted to make use of the lights of the Chanukah candles; rather we are only allowed to reflect upon them and in doing so, acknowledge and give thanks for the miracles G-d continues to bestow upon us. Each night, we add another Chanukah candle to our menorah, increasing the intensity as we move from darkness to greater illumination. In this way, we can think about ways in which we can meaningfully and increasingly provide light for those who bear the brunt of our communal burden during times of darkness.

Chanukah candles are unlike birthday candles or even Havdalah candles in that we are not supposed to put them out – we are supposed to help the light last for as long as possible. We too should aim to keep the “light” of gratitude burning no matter the circumstance. Just as the menorah's oil miraculously lasted eight days in the time of the Maccabees, we can endeavor to emulate this miracle through ongoing appreciation, support, and kindness.

These professionals care deeply, work tirelessly, and dedicate themselves to uniting and strengthening our Jewish community. As we move from Thanksgiving to Chanukah, we have a chance to continue expressing our gratitude. The eight nights of Chanukah give us eight chances to increase the light we bring into the world.

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