



# THE LIGHT WITHIN





# The Light Within

**Hanukkah Companion 5783**

## Introduction

Contained within every one of us is divine light. How do we bring forth the light from within ourselves? How can we see this light in others?

A *midrash* in Bereishit Rabbah 3:8 reflects on the source of light in the creation narrative. Rather than physical light that demarcates day and night, what creates “daylight” in our world is the righteous deeds, *mitzvot*, and acts of kindness and compassion that people choose to perform. According to this picture, actions which spread the pleasant and peaceful ways of Torah are “day.” Actions which harm and spread darkness and confusion are “night.”

This teaching highlights the moment in which it is in our hands to choose to be conscious creators of and participants in our realities. Yes, there are circumstances in our lives that are beyond our control. And, we can still make choices, large or small, which bring forth that divine light in us.





When we live with intentionality, each moment of our lives presents us with a choice. In the presence of my loved ones, will I be present, or distracted? When the opportunity to do a *mitzvah* arises, will I take it? When I am out in the world, will I notice and honor the needs of others around me? When speaking to myself, or to others, will I choose words of lovingkindness? Each conscious effort we make to bring out our divine light carries an impact.

For these eight nights of Hanukkah, I invite you to see yourself as a candle, seeking out more opportunity for spreading light. Whenever possible, try to pause before speaking, before acting. Take a breath and search within. What are my choices here? Where can I find an opportunity for light? For generosity, for kindness, for compassion?

The potential you see may be for big changes, imagining all that's possible. Or the moments you notice may be small. But day after day, night after night of our lives, the light adds up. Notice it—in yourself and in your loved ones.

At the end of the day, as you light candles, pause. Name one moment that you chose light that day. See and appreciate your own power to spread light. Infused by God's light and the growing light of the Hanukkah candles, may we become vessels of light to illuminate the world.

—R. Goldie Guy and the Hadar team



# Night One: God's Primordial Light

*The Torah teaches us that God created light on the first day of creation, and yet God did not create the sun, moon, and stars until the fourth day! This midrash asks: If the sun, moon, and stars hadn't been created yet on the first day, then where did the light of the first day come from?*

Bereishit Rabbah 3:4	בראשית רבה ג:ד
<p>R. Shimon ben Yehotzadak asked R. Shmuel bar Nahman, “Since I heard about you that you are a master of <i>aggadah</i>, from where was the light created?”</p> <p>He said to him, “[The text] teaches that the Holy Blessed One enveloped Godself in [the light] as [one does with] a cloak, and made the splendor of God’s glory shine from one end of the world to the other.”</p> <p>[R. Shmuel bar Nahman] said it to him in a whisper.</p> <p>[R. Shimon ben Yehotzadak] said to him, “This is explicit scripture: ‘Wraps light as with a garment’ (Psalm 104:2)!”</p> <p>[R. Shmuel bar Nahman] said to him, “Just as I learnt it in a whisper, so I said it to you in a whisper.”</p>	<p>רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן יְהוֹצְדָק שָׁאַל לְרַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחֲמָן, אָמַר לוֹ מִפְּנֵי שְׁשִׁמְעֵתִי עֲלֶיךָ שְׂאֵתָה בְּעַל אֲגָדָה, מֵהֵיכָן נִבְרָאת הָאוֹרָה,</p> <p>אָמַר לוֹ מִלְמַד שְׁנִתְעַטֵּף בָּהּ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא כְּשֶׁלָּמָה וְהִבְהִיק זֵיו הַדָּרוֹ מִסוֹף הָעוֹלָם וְעַד סוֹפוֹ.</p> <p>אָמְרָה לֵיהּ בְּלַחֲשָׁה,</p> <p>אָמַר לוֹ מִקְרָא מֵלֹא הוּא (תְּהִלִּים קד, ב): עוֹטָה אוֹר כְּשֶׁלָּמָה.</p> <p>אָמַר לוֹ כָּשֵׁם שְׁשִׁמְעֵתִיהּ בְּלַחֲשָׁה</p> <p>כֹּה אָמַרְתִּיהּ לָךְ בְּלַחֲשָׁה.</p>

*Where did the light of the first day come from, if the sun, moon, and stars did not yet exist? The midrash answers: the light of the first day shone from within God. The light of the first day was not a physical light which came out of the sun, but inner light emanating from God.*



**Questions for Discussion:**

1. What does it mean to imagine God's light filling the world?
2. Where do we see this light? Where does God's light come from?
3. Why do you think R. Shmuel bar Nahman had to whisper about it?
4. According to Bereishit Rabbah 3:6, this divine light was too powerful for the physical world, and so was hidden away for the righteous to access in the future. How do you think we can access the divine light that is hidden beneath the surface of our world?

## Night Two: Garments of Light

*Last night we learned about a spiritual light which emanated from God on the first day of Creation. In tonight's text, we learn about another way God used light at the time of Creation. After Adam and Havah eat from the Tree of Knowledge, they become aware of their nakedness. God makes clothing for them which the Torah calls "kotnot or (עור)," or "garments made of animal skin." But R. Meir understands that these clothes were made of something else:*

Bereishit Rabbah 20:12	בראשית רבה כ"ב
<p>"Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them (Genesis 3:21). In the Torah of R. Meir, they found it written "garments of light"—these are the clothes of the first Adam.</p>	<p>וַיַּעַשׂ ה' אֱלֹקִים לְאָדָם וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ כְּתָנוֹת עוֹר          וַיַּלְבִּשֵׁם (בראשית ג, כא), בְּתוֹרָתוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי          מֵאִיר מְצָאוּ כְּתוּב כְּתָנוֹת אֹר, אֵלּוּ בְּגָדֵי          אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן</p>



Hebrew word “or (עור)” when spelled with an ayin means “skin,” but its homophone, spelled with an aleph (אור), means “light.” In the traditional text of the Torah, the or which God used to clothe Adam and Havah is spelled with an ayin. But R. Meir’s version of the text had this word spelled with an aleph. R. Meir’s Torah teaches that, even as God’s divine garment of light was hidden away, we got our own garments of light which could still exist in this physical, bounded world.

### Questions for Reflection

1. Why would God create garments of light for Adam and Havah? What would their purpose have been?
2. How might providing clothes of light address Adam and Havah’s shame in realizing they were naked?
3. Imagine you, too, were clothed in light by God soon after your creation. How does that make you feel?

## Night Three: Deeds of Light

The following midrash further develops the idea of “light” in the Creation narrative. Drawing on verses from the Creation narrative, Bereishit Rabbah expands our notion of who creates day and night, light and darkness, and layers on value judgments for light and dark.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These kinds of interpretations, equating light with good and darkness with evil, are extremely common and, while they can teach us important truths, we also should not ignore the ways in which these readings have been used in the service of racism and hate.



Bereishit Rabbah 3:8	בראשית רבה ג:ח
<p>Said R. Yannai: From the beginning of God's creation of the world, the Holy Blessed One watched the deeds of the righteous and the deeds of the wicked.</p> <p>"And the earth was formless"—these are the deeds of the wicked.</p> <p>"And God said, let there be light"—these are the deeds of the righteous.</p> <p>"And God separated between the light and the dark"—between the deeds of the righteous and the wicked.</p> <p>"And God called the light day"—these are the deeds of the righteous.</p> <p>"And the darkness he called night"—these are the deeds of the wicked.</p> <p>"And there was evening"—these are the deeds of the wicked.</p> <p>"And there was morning"—these are the deeds of the righteous.</p>	<p>אמר רבי ינאי: מתחלת ברייתו של עולם צפה הקדוש ברוך הוא מעשיהן של צדיקים ומעשיהם של רשעים:</p> <p>"והארץ היתה תהו" - אלו מעשיהם של רשעים.</p> <p>"ויאמר אלקים יהי אור" - אלו מעשיהן של צדיקים.</p> <p>"ויבדל אלקים בין האור ובין החשך" - בין מעשיהן של צדיקים למעשיהן של רשעים.</p> <p>"ויקרא אלקים לאור יום" - אלו מעשיהן של צדיקים.</p> <p>"ולחשך קרא לילה" - אלו מעשיהן של רשעים.</p> <p>"ויהי ערב" - אלו מעשיהן של רשעים.</p> <p>"ויהי בקר" - אלו מעשיהן של צדיקים.</p>

*This midrash explains that, when God created light, God placed the power to propagate light and darkness in our hands. Physical light and metaphorical light are intertwined. Actions which spread the pleasant and peaceful ways of Torah are “day.” Actions which harm and spread darkness and confusion are “night.”*

### Questions for Reflection

1. This teaching invites us to imagine a world in which our actions literally determine whether or not we experience light or darkness. If your *mitzvot* powered the daylight, how do you think your behaviors would change?
2. It's likely easier to think of the power of our actions in a metaphorical way: to "brighten" someone's day, or "darken" someone's mood. Can you call to mind a moment when you brightened someone's day with a *mitzvah*, a kind word, or an act of generosity?

## Night Four: Face of the Divine

*Last night we learned about our ability to create light or spread darkness through our actions. In Parashat Naso, God gives the Kohanim (priests) the power to bless other members of Benei Yisrael. God offers a specific formula for this blessing. In one of the verses, the priests call upon God to shine God's light towards us:*

Bemidbar 6:23-27	במדבר ו:כג-כז
<p>God spoke to Moses, "Speak to Aaron and his sons, 'Thus shall you bless the people of Israel. Say to them: May God bless you and protect you.</p>	<p>וַיִּדְבֹר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר  אֶל-אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל-בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר כֹּה  תְּבָרְכוּ אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָמֹר לָהֶם:  יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ:</p>



<p>May God shine God's face toward you and be gracious to you.</p> <p>May God lift up God's face toward you and grant you peace.'</p> <p>Thus they shall place My name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."</p>	<p>יָאֵר ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיְחַנּוּךָ:</p> <p>יִשָּׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם:</p> <p>וְשָׂמוּ אֶת־שְׁמִי עַל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֲנִי אֲבָרְכֵם:</p>
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### Questions for Reflection

1. How do you understand the meaning of this blessing?
2. What is the role of the Priests in giving this blessing? Why would they need to call upon God to shine God's light upon us?

*This verse is often understood as saying that God should deal favorably with us and show us compassion. The Hasidic master R. Moshe Hayyim Efraim of Sudilkov (1748-1780, Poland), author of the book Degel Maḥaneh Efraim, presents a different understanding of this blessing: God's illuminating God's face toward us means transforming our faces to look like the "face" of the Divine Presence.*

Degel Maḥaneh Efraim, Parashat Naso	דגל מחנה אפרים פרשת נשא
The Zohar on Parashat Yitro teaches that the faces of righteous are the faces of the Divine Presence. The Divine Presence is concealed in this world, but we are revealed, and we reflect the Divine Presence's face. And the hint to this is in the verse, "May God shine God's face towards	<p>עוד ירמוז ע"ד דאית' בזה"ק</p> <p>פרשה יתרו צדיקייא אנפיהון אנפי</p> <p>שכינתא ממש איהי באתכסיא</p> <p>ואינון באתגליא ואינון פנים דילה</p> <p>ממש ע"ש וזה י"ל הרמז יאר ה'</p>



you,” meaning, that you should be blessed to have God’s face, that your face should be the face of the Divine Presence itself, and understand this.

השם יאיר לך פניו אליך שיהיה לך  
פניו כביכול כנ"ל שיהיה אנפך אנפי  
שכינתא ממש והבן:

*The Degel Mahaneh Efraim interprets the blessing, “May God shine God’s face upon you,” as God transforming our faces into the face of the Divine. In other words, light spreads light. When God shines God’s face upon us, shares light with us, we become infused with grace. And with that, we are given the ability to share this light with others. And so the chain of light continues.*

### Questions for Reflection

1. How do you understand the role of God’s shining light in this transformation?
2. What might it mean for our faces to become faces of the Divine? What are some ways in which we reflect divine light?
3. How is this different from the plain understanding of the blessing discussed above? Is this blessing for our benefit, for the benefit of others, or both?
4. Remember that the Kohanim are the ones who offer this blessing to the rest of Benei Yisrael. How can we help each other transform into reflections of the Divine?

## Night Five: Glowing Ink

*In the text for Night Four, we learned about the transformation of our faces into faces of the Divine. God shines God’s light upon us, giving us blessings so that we are able to shine our light*



towards others. We thought about some ways to actively reflect divine light into the world, and bring that out in others. Tonight, we'll consider the light Moshe brought down with him from his encounter with the Divine atop Mount Sinai. How do the verses describe Moshe's interaction with the divine light he carried?

שמות לד:כט	Shemot 34:29
וַיְהִי בִרְדַּת מֹשֶׁה מֵהָר סִינַי וְשָׁנִי לַחַת הָעֵדֻת בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה בִּרְדָּתוֹ מִן־הָהָר וּמֹשֶׁה לֹא יָדַע כִּי קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו בְּדַבְּרוֹ אֹתוֹ:	So Moses came down from Mount Sinai. And as Moses came down from the mountain bearing the two tablets of the Covenant, Moses was not aware that the skin of his face was radiant, since he had spoken with God.

*This midrash wonders: what was it about the divine encounter which caused Moshe's face to shine? And why was Moshe unaware of this transference of light?*

שמות רבה מז:יא	Shemot Rabbah 47:11
רַבִּי יְהוּדָה בַּר נַחֲמָן בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן לֵקִישׁ אָמַר עַד שֶׁהָיָה כּוֹתֵב בְּקוּלָמוֹס נִשְׁתַּיֵּיר קִמְעָא, וְהֶעֱבִירוּ עַל רֹאשׁוֹ וּמִמֶּנּוּ נִעְשׂוּ לוֹ קֶרְנֵי הַהוֹד, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וּמֹשֶׁה לֹא יָדַע כִּי קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו."	R. Yehudah bar Nahman says in the name of R. Shimon ben Lakish: [Moshe] was writing with a reed that had a bit left over, and he passed it on his head, and from that reed the rays of splendor were made, as it is written, "And Moshe did not know that rays illuminated the skin of his face."



*In the plain reading of these verses, one might have assumed that the light on Moshe's face came from being in the presence of God on Mount Sinai. This midrash asserts that the light on Moshe's face came from the ink he used while transcribing God's Torah.*

### Questions for Reflection

1. The image of Moshe wiping his brow with ink seems to reflect the immense effort he put into learning and transmitting the Torah to Benei Yisrael. What's the significance of Moshe's radiance coming from the ink he used to write the Torah, rather than coming from encountering God?
2. Moshe's radiance was apparent to all who saw him come down from the mountain, but he himself was unaware of it. It is remarkable that we can be sources of bright light in the world but we may not know it. How can we learn to notice the good that we do?
3. How can we help others see the light they carry—their talents, their potential, and the good they already do in the world?

## Night Six: 36 Hours

*On Night Five we learned that sometimes we shine with the light of the Divine and we don't even know it. Active engagement with Torah and mitzvot brings out light in us, as it did in Moshe. We discussed how to remind each other of the light that we put forth into the world. The Hasidic Master R. Yehudah Leib Alter of Gur (1847-1905, Poland), known by the title of his work the Sefat Emet, finds significance in the 36 hours (3 days) when the original light of Creation shone, the*



time in between God saying “Let there be light!” and the creation of the luminaries. Where else do we find the number 36?

Sefat Emet, Hanukkah 1900	שפת אמת - בראשית - לחנוכה - שנת תרס"א
<p>It is in the Rokei'ah (R. Elazar of Wurms) that the 36 candles we light on Hanukkah parallel the 36 hours for which the original light of the six days of creation shone, before it was hidden away.</p> <p>If this is so, then it appears that each Hanukkah candle draws from the hidden light of creation and gives light in great darkness, as our Sages hinted with their description of the hidden as a light which shone from one end of the world to the other. There is no hiddenness or obscurity before this light.</p>	<p>איתא ברוקח כי הל"ו נרות דחנוכה מול הל"ו שעות שהאיר אור הגנוז בששת ימי בראשית ע"ש.</p> <p>א"כ נראה שנר חנוכה הוא מאור הגנוז והוא מאיר בתוך החושך הגדול זהו שרמזו שמאיר מסוף העולם ועד סופו שאין העלם וסתר עומד נגד זה האור</p>

*The Sefat Emet connects the 36 hours the original light of creation shone, and the 36 candles which we light over the course of 8 days of Hanukkah (not including the shamashim). Each candle we light on Hanukkah brings out the original light of Creation.*

### Questions for Reflection

1. When we light Hanukkah candles, it is our actions which bring out the hidden divine light of Creation. Can you name moments when you feel like a partner with God, revealing light in the world?



2. Why do you think God desires our active involvement in bringing out God's light?  
Why doesn't God just choose to reveal this original light to us?

## Night Seven: Routine

*Last night we learned about the connection between the first 36 hours of Creation when divine light illuminated the world, and the 36 candles of Hanukkah which allow us to bring out this hidden light. Tonight we will turn to another unique power of the Hanukkah lights to help see the world anew.*

Talmud Bavli Shabbat 23b	תלמוד בבלי שבת כג:
Said Rav Huna: One who is regular with [Hanukkah] lamps will have Torah scholar children.	אמר רב הונא: הרגיל בְּנֵי יוֹיִן לֵיהּ בְּנִים תְּלִמְדֵי חֲכָמִים.

### Question for Reflection

1. What is the connection between meticulously lighting Hanukkah candles and the associated reward of raising children to be Torah scholars?

*Based on this saying of Rav Huna, the Sefat Emet teaches that there is a unique potential in the mitzvah of lighting Hanukkah candles to help us see the possibility for newness within established routines:*



Sefat Emet, Hanukkah 1870	שפת אמת לחנוכה תרל"א ליל ה
“One who is accustomed ( <i>ragil</i> ) to kindle lights...”—this refers to a person who can bring new light and new life to routine actions ( <i>hergel</i> ).	הרגיל בנר להביא ההארה והתחדשות אל ההרגל.

*We often go about daily routine actions (hergelim) without thinking about how we are interacting with the world around us. Habits become ingrained, and they can be difficult to change. Hanukkah, according to the Sefat Emet, grants us the unique opportunity to be conscious about our habit, to see light, freshness, and possibility where we normally do not.*

*Rabba Yaffa Epstein explains that for eight nights we develop a routine of lighting candles. But each night, we see the possibility of more light in the world, and we add a candle. Hanukkah gives us the spaciousness to find holiness in our nightly routine, to find new avenues for shining an even greater light, outward.*

### Questions for Reflection

1. What routine in your life could use a fresh perspective?
2. Call to mind one daily routine or practice you have. How could you bring greater awareness to how you go about doing it?
3. How might we see more opportunities for *mitzvot*, generosity, or kindness in our daily interactions with others?



# Night Eight: Light Of the Nations

*On Night Seven, we spoke about the unique power Hanukkah candles hold for bringing greater light and awareness into our daily interactions. Isaiah 60 teaches that the divine light within us has the capacity to shine even brighter—and this is what will happen when the world is in a more perfected state:*

Isaiah 60:1-3	ישעיה ס:א-ג
Arise, shine, for your light has dawned; the Presence of God has shone upon you! Behold! Darkness shall cover the earth, and thick clouds the peoples; but upon you God will shine, and God's Presence be seen over you. And nations shall walk by your light; kings, by your shining radiance.	קוּמִי אוֹרִי כִּי בָא אוֹרְךָ וּכְבוֹד ה' עֲלֶיךָ זָרַח: כִּי־הִנֵּה הַחֹשֶׁךְ יִכְסֶּה־אֶרֶץ וְעֶרְפֹּל לְאֻמִּים וְעֲלֶיךָ יִזְרַח ה' וּכְבוֹדוֹ עֲלֶיךָ יֵרָאֶה: וְהָלְכוּ גוֹיִם לְאוֹרְךָ וּמֶלְכִים לְנֹגַהּ זָרְחָךְ:

*According to Isaiah, when we shine forth our inner divine light, we can illuminate the whole world, just like God in the first days of Creation.*

## Questions for Reflection

1. What do you think it means to be a light to other nations of the world?
2. On this final night of Hanukkah, can you name some practical ways you might spread light beyond your normal circles of interaction? How can you impact the lives of others who may not be in your immediate community?





# Conclusion

As we explored the theme of inner light together this Hanukkah, we saw how the light which emanated from God during Creation became our own inner light. This inner light, the capacity to create, brighten, uplift, enliven, and renew remains present within us as a resource we can draw upon at any time. The days of Hanukkah, however, hold a unique power to help us notice and cultivate this divine light within us. As we grow and nurture our inner resources, the impact of our light naturally spreads outwards: to our inner circles, to our broader communities, and ultimately, to the entire world.

May we sense the light of Creation within us, and be able to draw upon it in times of darkness. May we shine a light on our strengths, and also notice the places where there are opportunities for growth, and for adding light. And may the divine light shine through us to permeate the rest of our world.

*Hanukkah samei'ah!*

