



THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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THE LIGHTS OF CHANUKAH: THE POWER TO PURIFY (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita)

The Sages have taught, "The *mitzvah* of Chanukah [requires] a light for a man and his household. The zealous [kindle] a light for each member [of the household]. As for the extremely zealous, the House of Shammai maintains: 'On the first day eight lights are lit and thereafter they are gradually reduced,' but the House of Hillel says: 'On the first day one is lit and thereafter they are progressively increased' " (*Shabbat* 21b). The Gemara continues by providing reasons for both opinions: "The House of Shammai's reason is that it corresponds to the oxen of the festival [of Sukkot], while the House of Hillel's reason is that we ascend in sanctity, we do not descend." There is good reason to be surprised here, for can we say that Shammai's followers believed that we should descend in sanctity? We find no evidence of a disagreement on this subject, for everyone agrees that this is not the case.

The Gemara also states, "When the Greeks entered the Temple, they defiled all the oil found inside. When the Hasmonean dynasty prevailed and defeated them, they searched and found only one flask of oil, which had the seal of the *Kohen Gadol*. Although it contained only enough for one day's lighting, a miracle occurred and they lit [the Menorah] with it for eight days. The following year, these [days] were established as a festival, with praise and thanksgiving" (*Shabbat* 21b).

The commentators ask why the *kohanim* did not use impure oil for lighting the Menorah, since "impurity is permitted in the case of a community" (*Pesachim* 77a).

It is also difficult to understand why the Hasmoneans Sages established a festival because the oil had burned for eight days, since the Midrash cites Rabbi Hanania the Deputy High Priest as saying: "I served in the Temple and miraculous things happened with the Menorah. From the time we lit the Menorah on Rosh Hashanah until the following year, it never went out." The Midrash continues: "At one time, olives did not produce oil. The *kohanim* began to cry [variant reading: 'began to extinguish'], and Rabbi Hanania the Deputy High Priest said: 'I was

in the Temple and found the Menorah burning more than it had burned during all the days of the year' " (*Tanhuma, Tetzaveh* 3). I found this objection raised in the commentaries of the Satmar Rebbe (*Divrei Yoel, Chanukah*, p. 425).

They Wanted to Bring Them Back

To explain, we may say that when the Hasmoneans waged war against the Greeks, they were really fighting against two groups: Greek foreigners and Hellenized Jews who had become like foreigners because they studied Greek wisdom. However waging war against one group was not the same as waging war against the other. They killed the wicked Greeks who wanted to render them impure and make them forget the Torah, but they could not do the same with the Hellenized Jews who wanted to completely assimilate. This is because it is written, "As I live – the word of Hashem G-d – I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should return from his way and live. Repent, repent from your evil ways! Why should you die, O House of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11). Hence they did not try to kill them, but instead tried to bring them back to the Torah.

How do the righteous return the wicked to the right path? It is by teaching them in such a way that they study the holy Torah, not Greek wisdom. Having killed the Greeks foreigners, the Hasmoneans immediately entered the Temple to light the Menorah. Now the Menorah alludes to the holy Torah, as the Sages have said on the verse, "For the *mitzvah* is a lamp, and the Torah is light" (*Mishlei* 6:23): "The verse identifies a *mitzvah* with a lamp and the Torah with light. The *mitzvah* [is identified] with a lamp in order to tell you that just as a lamp only protects temporarily, likewise a *mitzvah* only protects temporarily. The Torah [is identified] with light in order to tell you that just as light protects permanently, likewise the Torah protects permanently" (*Sotah* 21a).

When the wicked began returning to the Torah, the light of the Torah immediately drew them closer to the right path, and the Hellenized Jews became increasingly smaller in number each day, to the point that not a single one of them remained. This

is because the light of the Torah led them to repent and to reject Greek wisdom.

This is why the House of Shammai said that the essential part of the miracle was that the wicked among them repented. The *tzaddikim* overcame Greek power, and the holy Torah overcame Greek wisdom. Since this miracle occurred on account of the holy Torah, and because the Menorah alludes to the holy Torah, they believed that a lesser number of lights should be lit as the days progressed, alluding to the fact that the impurity of the Hellenists lessened until it eventually disappeared. On the following year, the nobles among the Hasmoneans established that lights should be lit in order to recall the fact that through the light of the Torah, the wicked repented and the flask of oil purified their hearts.

The House of Hillel believed that since the Sages said that we must ascend in holiness, not descend in it, the lighting of the Menorah should proceed in the same way. Just as the wicked were increasingly drawn towards holiness, with more people rallying around the Torah each day, likewise the number of lights being lit each day should increase. This is because the light of Torah increased from day to day until it became extremely bright, and thus Greek wisdom was extirpated among the Jewish people by the power of the Torah

Furthermore, the flask of oil that was found in the Temple carried the seal of Shimon HaTzaddik the *Kohen Gadol*, who in his time had conquered the highest Greek authority, as our Sages recount:

"[When] the Samaritans asked for [control over] the Temple from Alexander the Macedonian, in order to destroy it...some people came and informed Shimon HaTzaddik. What did he do? He put on his priestly garments and robed himself in priestly garments, and some of the nobles of Israel went with him, carrying flaming torches in their hands, and they walked all night long.... When dawn arose, [Alexander] said to them: 'Who are these people?' They answered, 'The Jews who rebelled against you.' As he reached Antipatris, the sun having risen,

they met. When [Alexander] saw Shimon HaTzaddik, he descended from his chariot and bowed before him. They said to him, 'A great king like yourself is bowing before this Jew?' He replied, 'His image is what wins my battles for me' (Yoma 69a).

Shemen and Neshama

When the Hasmoneans found the flask of oil with his seal upon it, everyone realized that the wicked would repent and that Greek wisdom would disappear from among the people. It would be like when Alexander the Macedonian bowed before Shimon HaTzaddik, for Alexander had been taught by Aristotle, the greatest Greek philosopher.

Hence the Sages decreed that the first day would be a festival, for oil had been found on that day. This discovery meant that they would return to the Torah, that

Greek wisdom would disappear from among the people, and that the wisdom of the Torah would regain its rightful place. We may even add that the letters forming the word *shemen* ("oil") also form the word *neshama* ("soul"), for it was through oil that the soul of Israel was purified in the era of the Hasmoneans. This explains why they could not light the Menorah with oil that was impure, for they needed pure oil to cleanse their hearts.

This is why the Sages established a festival for all the generations. Each year, every person can purify himself of mundane wisdom by the power of Torah that shines on Chanukah. Just as Shimon HaTzaddik in his time annulled Greek power, the Hasmoneans did the same in their time, and likewise everyone can extirpate the wisdom of the nations from his heart and study the holy Torah exclusively. In this way, the light it contains will return people to the right path.

A TRUE STORY

CHANUKAH AMID THE DARKNESS OF THE HOLOCAUST

An Account by Mordechai Ansbacher, Survivor of Dachau

Do you know what was the most difficult thing about Dachau? It was keeping track of the holidays. For us, the difference between day and night had completely disappeared, as did the difference between workdays and days of rest, between ordinary days and holidays. All our hours and moments became entangled and formed a dark mixture. Everything was jumbled, and into this mixture we were ruthlessly plunged.

Who threw a safety line to us in this pit? It was the elderly Fischhoff, the old *shamash* from the ancient Alt-Neu Shul in Prague. Fischhoff never lost focus of his ancient role, not even for an instant, and he always kept track of the Jewish calendar in his head with great precision. He was thus able to present us with a dazzling spark: The arrival of Chanukah!

Everything around us was somber and grave. Darkness and obscurity surrounded us. At five a.m., we were clearing a path on the endless road that went from Kaufering Camp Number Four to tunnels that had been built by the sweat of our brows, tunnels that contained immense fuel reservoirs for Nazi airplanes. At six p.m., we dragged our frozen and exhausted feet back to the camp's miserable barracks. On this road of misery, a spark leaped towards us: "Chanukah! In one week it will be the first night of Chanukah," said the old Fischhoff.

With what were we going to prepare for Chanukah? Old Fischhoff was going to take care of that in time.

"Tomorrow we're going to be given our weekly ration of margarine. Instead of eating the margarine, we'll keep the fat for lighting the Chanukah candles," advised the old man. "Then we'll secretly gather in one of the barracks at midnight."

Several young prisoners agreed to this scheme. Since the old *shamash* of the legendary Alt-Neu Shul served as a living symbol and intriguing example of the "perpetual light" that never went out, we accepted his advice without opposition, even though the sacrifice demanded of us was substantial.

Is this a small thing in your eyes, a weekly ration of margarine? To us, it was the fuel of life. We the enslaved Jews were allotted ten grams of margarine for an entire week. How could this suffice? The Capo would use his sharpened knife to cut a small portion of margarine, which was barely enough to spread upon a single slice of bread. Yet to us, it was truly a portion of life. A drop of fat reheated the body and reinvigorated old bones. Yet now, we had to put our lives in danger and sacrifice our portion of margarine.

"How can we keep the margarine until the lighting of the candles in six days?" asked a member of our secret group.

"Yes, that's a good question," the old man replied with an air of sadness.

"I have an idea," I said. "In my rucksack I have two potatoes that I managed to

take from the kitchen. We can make a hole in them, and there we can put the margarine that we'll collect."

This is precisely what we did. I devoted these two potatoes to this lofty goal. Every person scraped the portion of margarine from his slice of bread and gave me this treasure to keep. I cut each potato in half and hollowed them out, and I placed the margarine within them. I then stuck the two halves together and hid this treasure in a secret place that nobody knew of.

Don't forget that these were my potatoes. Since I had offered to give them up, everyone placed their trust in me and was certain that I would resist every temptation to take them for myself. They trusted me to protect this infinitely precious treasure.

When the first night of Chanukah arrived, old Fischhoff was unrecognizable. His face had changed and his eyes shined with supernatural brilliance. The long journey from the bunkers to the camp barracks seemed almost enchanted, with Fischhoff humming the tune *Maoz Tzur Yeshuati* to us during the entire time. None of us had the slightest doubt that he, the *shamash*, would light the first candle. However I had one thought that preoccupied me: In what were we going to light the candles? Where were we going to get a lamp or some utensil in which to light them?

"Although I have the treasure," I cautiously whispered into the ears of Fischhoff, "tell me how we're going to melt the margarine so we can light it and say the blessing for Chanukah?"

"Don't worry! Everything will be alright!" said old Fischhoff in a voice that was filled with joy. In fact joy was radiating from him, and it was utterly impossible to diminish it.

"What does that mean?" I asked, my surprise being even greater at that point. Fischhoff himself was taken aback by my question. "How can you not understand?" he asked. "We'll leave the margarine in the potatoes, and that's how we'll light the Chanukah lights. Under these conditions, we don't have a more practical or appropriate receptacle. The main thing is not to lose a single drop of fat."

At midnight, everyone in Camp Number Four was quickly alerted. What was going on? It was the first night of Chanukah, and the lighting took place in a half-potato that was placed on the highest wooden beam in the barracks. Fischhoff recited the blessing, and when he recited the words "these lights are consecrated" with a quivering voice, others joined him, the voices of all the prisoners springing forth from their hearts.

How right had old Fischhoff been! We had definitely lost nothing by depriving ourselves of our portion of margarine, for we clearly felt that this light shined and ignited a source of courage and vitality in us all!

AT THE SOURCE

Not Even For An Instant

It is written, "They rushed him from the dungeon" (*Bereshith* 41:14).

Joseph remained in prison for twelve years, each day seeming like an eternity to him, and nobody tried to rescue him from there. Yet when the time came for G-d's decree to take effect – for Joseph to be released – he was *rushed* out of prison. Thus we read, "Everything has its season, and there is a time for everything" (*Kohelet* 3:1), meaning that when the time comes, Hashem does not delay for even an instant.

The Chafetz Chaim said that when the time comes for our deliverance, *Mashiach* will arrive at the exact time, suddenly, and not an instant before or later. At that time as well, we will be quickly taken from exile towards the land of our deliverance. We will not linger in exile for even an instant.

Removing Their Suspicions

It is written, "Could we find another like him – a man in whom is the spirit of G-d?" (*Bereshith* 41:38).

In his book *Bnei Shlomo*, Rabbi Shlomo Nachmias *Zatzal* writes: "In man there are 248 limbs that correspond to the 248 positive *mitzvot*, and 365 sinews that correspond to the 365 negative *mitzvot*. When a person commits a sin, the corresponding bodily member is affected."

People suspected the righteous Joseph of having committed adultery. Therefore to remove any doubts that people had about him, Pharaoh said to his servants: "Could we find another like him – a man in *asher ruach El-kim* [whom is the spirit of G-d]?" The last letters of these three Hebrew words are *resh chet mem*, the numerical value of which comes to 248. This meant that all of Joseph's 248 limbs were complete. If he had committed a sin, the *Shechinah* would not have dwelled on him. Yet since it did, this proved that he was certainly perfect, without any sin.

Pharaoh's Words

It is written, "Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since G-d has informed you of all this...'" (*Bereshith* 41:39).

In his book *Yismach Israel*, Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer *Zatzal* interprets this verse allegorically. He explains it in the following way:

"Since G-d has informed you" – this is the solution of the dream that Joseph interpreted for Pharaoh.

"All" – including the fact that Joseph knew 70 languages, since the Sages say that the angel Gabriel came and taught Joseph 70 languages.

"This" – an allusion to the Torah, which is called *zot* (this), as it is written: "*Zot* [This] is the Torah that Moshe set." The Sages have said that Jacob taught the Torah to Joseph.

This is why Pharaoh told him: "Since Hashem revealed all this to you in 70 languages, and He also announced the Torah to you, then obviously 'there can be no one as discerning and wise as you.' For it is by the Torah that man is called discerning and wise, as it is written: 'When they hear all these laws, they will say: Only a discerning and wise people.'"

Greediness

It is written, "Joseph's brothers – ten of them – went down to buy grain from Egypt" (*Bereshith* 42:3).

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir of Ger *Zatzal* interprets this verse as a reprimand:

Lishbor ("to buy grain") – this refers to breaking (*lishbor*) the characteristic of greediness. In a place where there is nothing to eat, it is easy not to desire an excessive amount of food. Yet it is precisely in Egypt – where there is food in abundance – that this becomes difficult to do.

The Status of a Prince

It is written, "Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him" (*Bereshith* 42:8).

Why did Joseph recognize his brothers, but they did not recognize him?

The book *Likutei Sichot* explains this according to a Halachah brought in the Gemara: "Anyone who looks at three things, his eyes become dim: At the rainbow, at the prince, and at the *kohanim*" (*Chagigah* 16a).

It was forbidden for the brothers to look at Joseph directly, for he had the status of a prince. This is why Joseph could look at his brothers and recognize them, whereas they could not look straight at him. Hence they failed to recognize him.

Meraglim

It is written, "As Pharaoh lives, you are surely spies" (*Bereshith* 42:16).

It is surprising to read that Joseph lied by accusing his brothers of being spies. In his book *Shevet Mussar*, Rabbi Eliyahu HaCohen *Zatzal* explains this allegorically:

The word *meraglim* ("spies") is composed of the first letters in the expression *Mizera Rachel Ganavtem Leorchat Yishmaelim Machartem*, meaning: "You have stolen from the descendants of Rachel. You have sold to a caravan of Ishmaelites."

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA FROM THE TEACHINGS OF TZADDIK RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA

Why Benjamin Merited the Temple on His Territory

It is written, "The cup was found in Benjamin's sack" (*Bereshith* 44:12).

In the Midrash the Sages say, "They struck Benjamin on the shoulders and said, 'Thief and son of a thief!' The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Benjamin: 'Because you did not respond, by your life, the Temple will be built upon your shoulders.' Thus it is said, 'He hovers over him all day long and rests between his shoulders' [*Devarim* 33:12]" (*Tanchuma, Mikeitz* 10).

I thought that I would explain why G-d rewarded Benjamin with the construction of the Temple on his territory because he did not respond to the accusations of his brothers. As we know, the Sages have said that the Second Temple was destroyed on account of baseless hatred (*Yoma* 9b). Our holy books explain that this is because the Holy One, blessed be He, does not allow His *Shechinah* to rest upon the Jewish people when they are not completely united.

It is also written that the Temple is the heart of the world (*Zohar* I:84b). In other words, it is the focal point that unites everyone. Therefore when hatred exists among Jews, the *Shechinah* cannot reside among them and the Temple is no longer the heart of the world, in which case it will be destroyed.

If Benjamin had responded to his brothers, there would have been a dispute among them. The resulting strife and baseless hatred caused by such a dispute would have led to the destruction of the Temple.

Hence when Benjamin did not respond as his brothers shamed him, everyone remained united, which is why he merited the building of the Temple on his territory.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

They Will Ridicule Him

The prohibition against speaking *Lashon Harah* originates from the fact that the Torah has forbidden us from speaking ill of other people, even if what we say is true, and even if we recount it to just one person. How much more is it forbidden to recount it to two people. The sin in that case is greater than recounting it to one person, for our words are more likely to be believed. People will ridicule the subject when they hear stories about him from two people.

– Chafetz Chaim

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI CHAIM SHMULEVITZ

The *gaon* Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz *Zatzal*, who grew up to become the leader of the great Mir yeshiva and influenced thousands of students in Israel and around the world by the light of his Torah, had a difficult youth. At the age of 17, he lost both of his parents and lived in poverty, although it was insignificant compared to the spiritual wealth and pleasure that he found in the pages of the Gemara as a young man.

During the First World War, his father Rabbi Raphael Alter *Zatzal* had been living in the Polish city of Grodno, where he established the Grodno yeshiva. Before his death, he summoned his son Chaim and asked him to watch over his sisters and brother.

This catastrophic loss resulted in the young man becoming responsible for the welfare of his two sisters and little brother, who was not yet five years old at the time. His sense of responsibility, a virtue that Rabbi Chaim considered as the foundation of human nature, obligated him to take care of his siblings, who had become orphans. At the time, a famine began in Poland and raged throughout the war years. Rabbi Chaim spent his time at the market by day, trying to earn a few cents to feed his family. During the rest of the day and the long nights, he studied Torah. His sisters and brother said that they often did not remember seeing him sleep. The young man spent entire nights writing down Torah explanations that came to him during the hours that he worked at the market. With tireless diligence and boundless devotion, he elevated his soul and worked on perfecting himself in Torah during those difficult years.

Rabbi Chaim once told his students, "When I arrive in Heaven after 120 years on earth, I will be asked where I wish to go, and I will say Gan Eden."

"I will then be asked, 'Why Gan Eden?'"

"I will reply, 'Because I studied Torah.'"

"I will be told, 'But all your Torah studies were pleasurable for you!' What will I say then? They will be right! However they will agree that I do not deserve Gehinnom either. I will then suggest a compromise: 'Bring me a *shtender*, a cup of tea, and tractate *Nedarim*, and I will continue to study.'"

As Time Passes, the Gulf Increases

The *Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva's* prayers were famous. The prayers that he recited by the graves of the *tzaddikim*, which he visited regularly, were a special event. Once as he was traveling through the Galilee, he visited the graves of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, Rabbi Meir Ba'al Hanes, the Rambam, and the Ridbaz. During this journey, he stated that the closer the deceased is to our generation, the greater the feeling of a connection with him, and the more effective prayer becomes. Likewise the further the deceased is from our generation, the more the feeling of the gulf increases, and the more difficult prayer becomes.

There were some *tzaddikim* by whose graves he shed tears like water, such as by the grave of the holy Ohr HaChaim, whom Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz called *rabbi* ("my teacher"). He went to his grave and asked him for forgiveness because he had a different view on certain verses. By other graves, he would recite special prayers. For example, by the graves of the Patriarchs, he asked for mercy with a burning heart in regards to three things: That the dead of Israel should find a resting place with their bodies intact; that those who are far from Torah should have the merit of opening their eyes and seeing the truth; and that the holy Patriarchs should go before the Throne of Glory and pray for the peace of the Jewish people in their land.

By the grave of our mother Rachel, Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz wept and said: "Mother Rachel, the Holy One, blessed be He, asked you: 'Refrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears.' Your Father asks you to stop weeping, but your son asks you not to stop weeping. Mother, go before the Throne of Glory and ask for mercy on behalf of your children, for they are suffering!"

During one of his classes on the eve of Yom Kippur, Rabbi Chaim said that he had gone to pray by the graves of the *tzaddikim*, but felt that his prayer had not been answered. Upon returning from the grave of the holy Ohr HaChaim, he passed by *Yad Avshalom* [Absalom's Tomb]. Rabbi Chaim stayed by the stone monument for a long time, looking at it as if he were meditating. To the utter surprise of those who accompanied him, he suddenly began to pray. They looked at him with bewilderment, for why would he possibly pray before this monument? Absalom was a corrupt man, a murderer, a sinner! In fact his father David had to draw him up from the seventh level of Gehinnom!

Rabbi Chaim replied, "I will tell you what I said in my prayer, which was accepted. I said, 'Sovereign of the universe, when someone tells his friend that he forgives him, these are but words. Only a father, when he tells his son that he forgives him, has truly forgiven. David was pursued by his rebellious son, who caused him great difficulties, and yet he forgave him. Sovereign of the universe! You are a father and Your forgiveness is real! I beg of You, say: I forgive!' "

Rabbi Chaim had a tradition from the Chafetz Chaim to speak about the Jews of Russia on the night of Yom Kippur. A third of the Jewish people were ruled by the Russians, who prevented them from performing *mitzvot*. The result was that they were slowly growing further apart from their Creator. Rabbi Chaim believed that with each passing year, the destruction of their religious life was only increasing. During the years when nobody dreamed that a Jew could leave Russia, Rabbi Chaim stood on the dais and called for their liberation, as if it were an absolute possibility.

The Power of Tears

Because Rabbi Chaim had difficulty hearing, he would usually stand close to the person reading the Torah. When he listened to the passage concerning the sale of Joseph, or when he heard the *Haftarah* on Chana and Penina, he would burst into bitter weeping. During the reading of the *Megillah*, he would also melt into tears. The description of the suffering of Rabbi Akiva and the daughter of Kalba Savua greatly moved him. One time, as he was giving a Mussar class from the dais, he gave a long explanation on what the Sages said about the issue. Suddenly, tears began to drench his face. In fact these tears filled his throat, preventing him from continuing.

Whenever Rabbi Chaim heard that someone was sick, he would weep for them. Sometimes he would pace inside his room without respite because of his pain.

Whenever a great Torah figure fell ill, Rabbi Chaim insisted on participating on all public prayers by the remnants of our Temple. Once, a few months before his passing, Rabbi Chaim changed the time of one of his classes, moving it from the evening to the afternoon in order to participate in a scheduled evening prayer. People could see that the pain of others affected him to the depths of his soul, and that within his heart he felt all the intensity of people's sufferings. In his prayers and supplications, Rabbi Chaim was swept away by a powerful wave of emotion, a feeling that affected everyone around him. In him people could clearly see the concept of a person becoming sick over another.

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz's Mussar classes became the foundation for ethical concepts that were deeply engraved in the consciousness of those who studied Torah and Mussar. The day of his passing, Tevet 3, is considered in *Batei Mussar* as a time for spiritual elevation and perfecting one's *middot*. May his merit protect us all.

THE WORDS OF THE SAGES

Chasing Darkness Away

Rabbi Asher *Zatzal*, the great Torah figure of Stoln, would usually have a meal for Chanukah after lighting the eighth candle. He would then sing *Hadran alach ner chanukah ve'hadrach alan*, as we say when celebrating the end of a tractate, out of love for the *mitzvah*. When Rabbi Asher was asked about this, he explained: "Chanukah possesses something found in no other *mitzvah*."

On day, the chassidim asked his son, the Rebbe of Karlin and author of *Beit Aharon*: "Why does your father extol the *mitzvah* of Chanukah so greatly, saying that it possesses something found in no other *mitzvah*? We know that 'Chanukah lights must be lower than ten *tefachim*.'"

The Beit Aharon explained, "When the Sages said 'Chanukah lights must be lower than ten *tefachim*,' they did not mean that the light and the lighting of the candles are inferior to other *mitzvot*. On the contrary, its light is strong and shines so brightly that it chases darkness away from even the lowest and darkest of places."